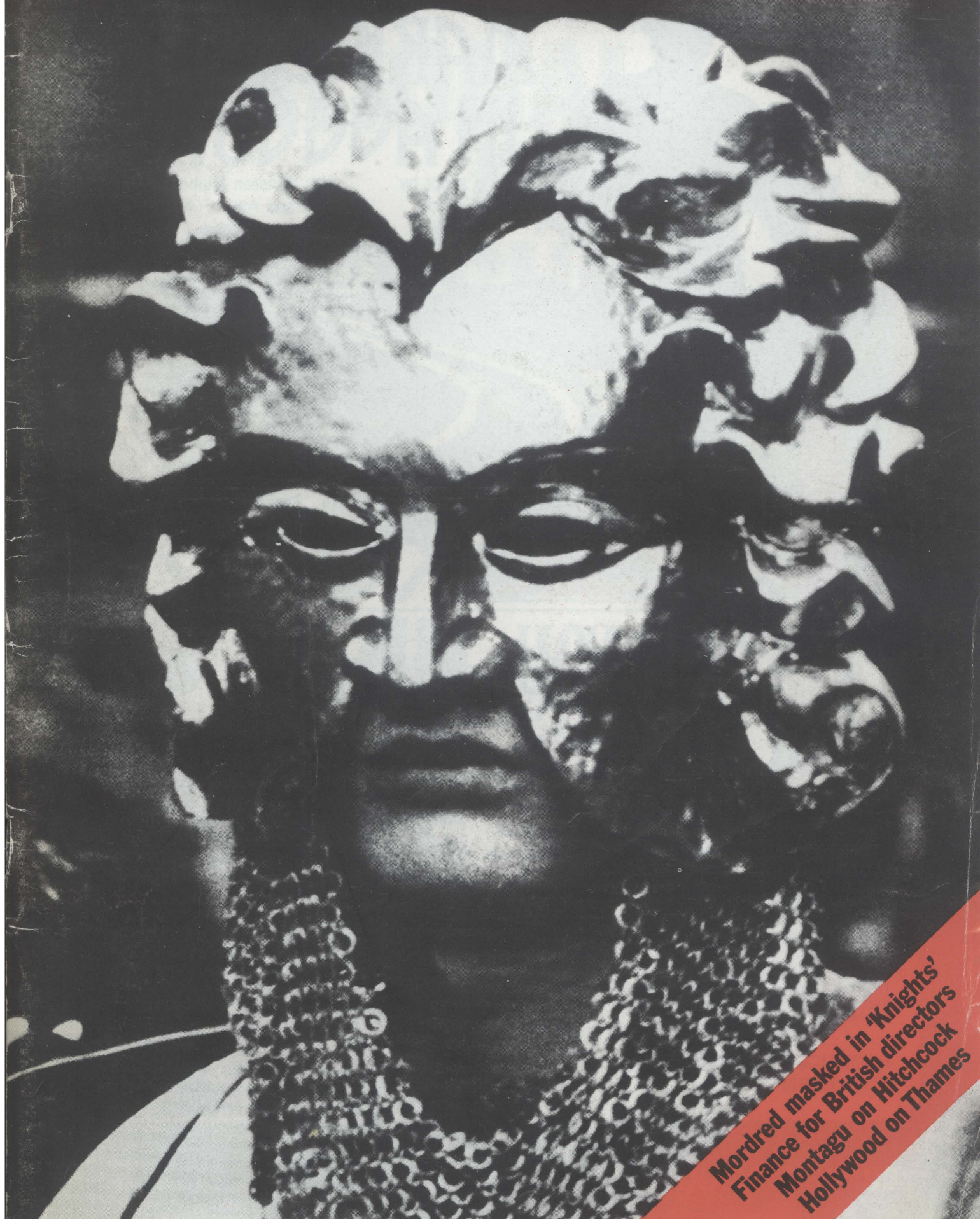


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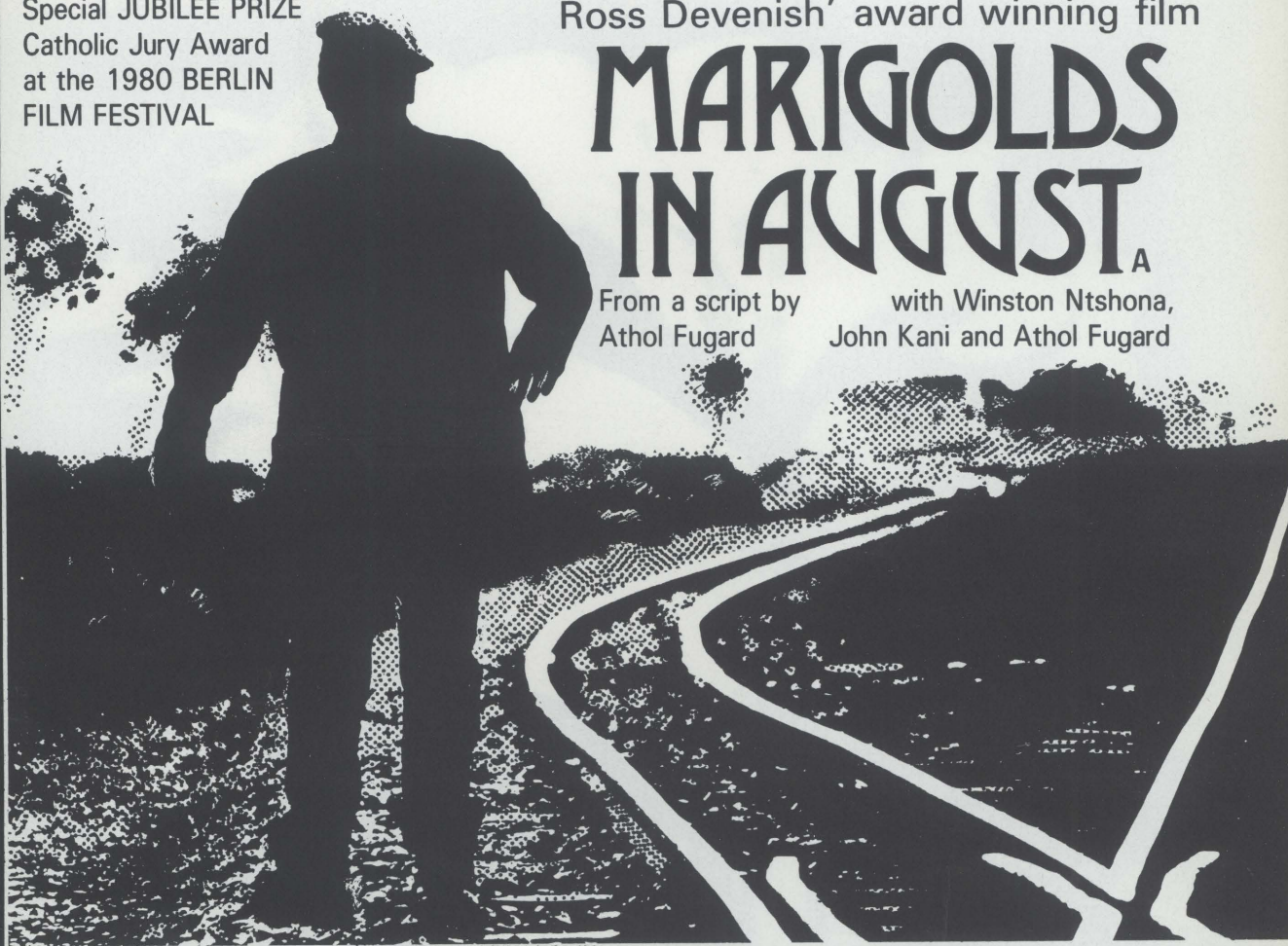
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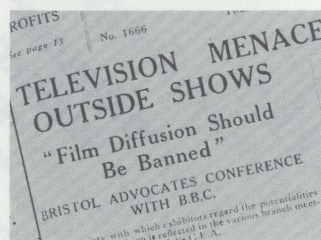
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On the cover: John Boorman's '*Knights*' (see page 168)



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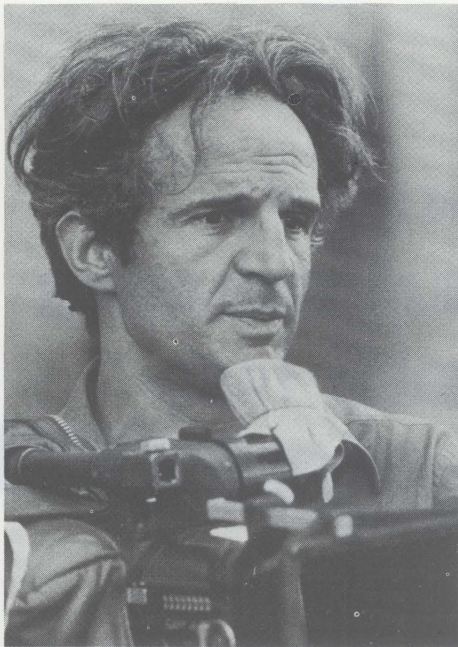
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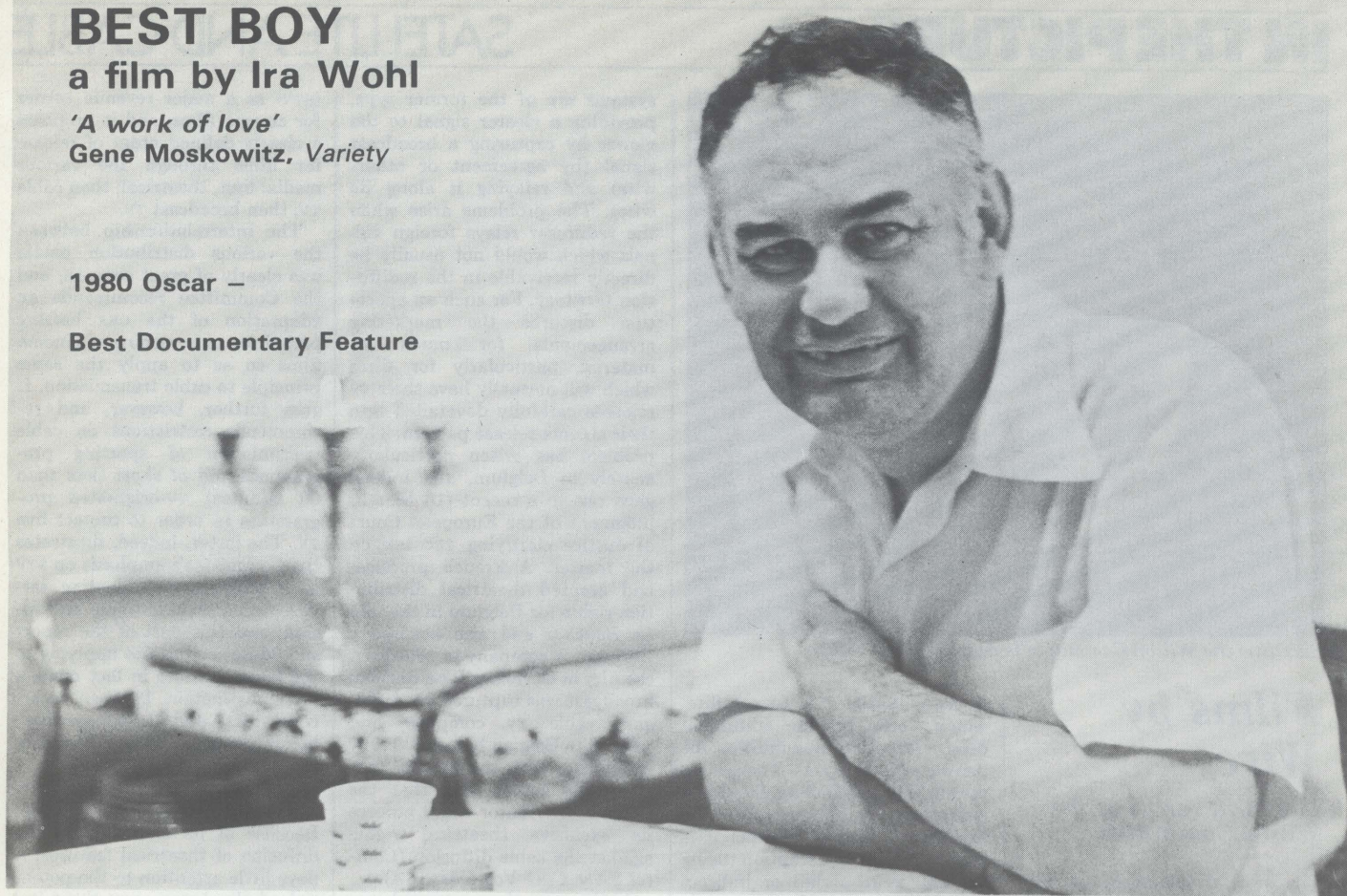


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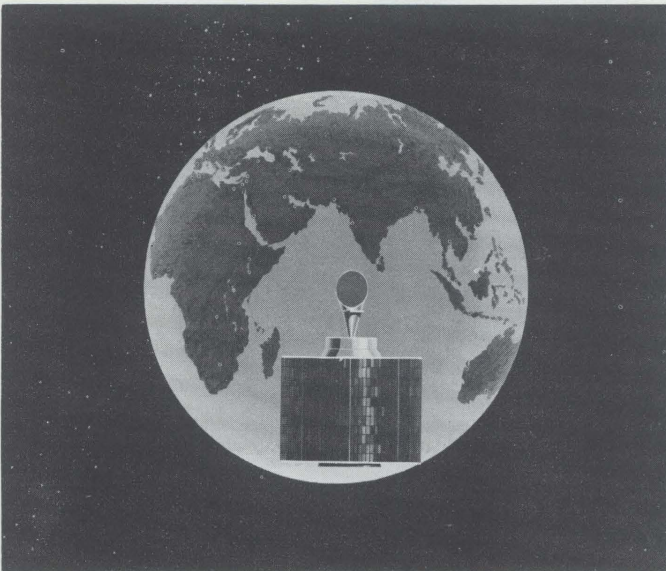
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Satellite: the Wilson Committee is worried about control.

## Films by Wire

### The third report of the Wilson Committee

The swift development of fibre optics and the possibility, which is almost a probability, that telephone lines will before long be replaced by optical fibre cables with their revolutionary multi-use carrying capacity, means that it is not too soon to begin thinking of the home as a variegated video box, with one or more screens attached to a bank of controls for use as computer, vewdata, videophone or teletransmission of still and moving pictures (all using cable), or for TV games and home shows (by cassettes or discs), or for traditional or satellite television (over the air). All these are operational now somewhere in the world; the change will lie in bringing them all together. And the cables which will do that will themselves form the land-line ends to transcontinental space communication via geostationary satellites, as they do now to a small but rapidly increasing extent.

The Wilson Committee (Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry) in its new third report on *Statistics, Technological Development and Cable Television* looks at some of the implications for the present structure. It is a document of only 24 pages, and so it can only highlight a few of the relevant issues. Its consideration of the impact of videocassettes and videodiscs is, for instance, cursory, focused almost exclusively on feature films and on the negative aspects, and it adopts the basic Whitford proposal that a compulsory copying royalty (tax) should be imposed on the sale of video-recording equipment.

Satellite broadcasting receives more attention, mainly directed

to the potential of a 'UK satellite' which would provide additional direct reception possibilities for private television sets. There is no reason why this facility should be regulated any differently from the existing TV system, whether it is a matter of direct reception (using yet one more aerial) or indirect reception via a cable TV system. The Committee, however, looking particularly at the impact on the circulation of feature films, strongly hints at the desirability of a pay-TV system for satellite transmissions.

It is also concerned with the question of overspill of satellite signals—the danger of foreigners receiving the UK transmissions free of charge and, even more, the possibility of British viewers receiving foreign transmissions 'outside the control of the British Government or of the British film and television industries.' It is indeed territorial overspill which has been the major cause of debate in international circles, and one can envisage communication satellites performing for video signals the same function as the ionosphere does for radio signals, enabling a TV set to receive as wide a variety of international programmes as we are used to hearing on our radio sets. The difference lies in the alternative vested interests. The gramophone industry is organised in a much more liberal manner than the film industry; and the Committee's fears concerning the impact of satellite broadcasting are linked closely to its concern for existing patterns of distribution of feature films.

But the problems of control of the exhibition of films and concern for cinema managers in a TV context have already emerged in relation to over-the-air broadcasting and cable television; satellites merely add to this an increased scale.

Cable TV basically takes two forms: rediffusion and original 'broadcasting'. Most European

systems are of the former type, providing a clearer signal to the viewer by capturing a broadcast signal (by agreement or otherwise) and relaying it along its wires. The problems arise when the rediffuser relays foreign signals which would not usually be directly receivable in the rediffusion territory. For such an operation disturbs the marketing arrangements for much TV material, particularly for films which will normally have their TV releases carefully dovetailed into their cinema release pattern. This problem has arisen particularly acutely in Belgium, and indeed gave rise to a recent (18 March) judgment of the European Court of Justice clarifying EEC law on the matter. A French producer had granted theatrical distribution rights for Belgium in the film *Le Boucher* and also licensed a German TV company to broadcast the film in Germany. The German broadcast was captured by a Belgian cable TV company and relayed to Belgian homes, thereby interfering with the cinema takings. The courts held that the Belgian distributor could enforce its exclusive theatrical rights against the cable diffusion (*Coditel SA v. Ciné Vog Films SA*).

At the same time, a second case concerned another aspect of Belgian cable TV. Rediffusion systems rely heavily on automation and it is uneconomic to use human monitors to make minute-by-minute programme changes. All Belgian TV is subject to a statutory 'no-advertising' rule, but many of the surrounding foreign broadcasts which are rediffused in Belgium carry advertising spots. The cable companies have not wanted to employ someone to watch the incoming signals all day and manually block out retransmission of the advertisements, and so they have been passing on the complete broadcasts, advertisements included. The European Court held (in *Debaue*) that enforcement of the Belgian no-advertising rule on rediffusion of foreign programmes did not infringe EEC free movement rules.

The Wilson Committee considered this problem briefly and indirectly, since it was more concerned with the second form of cable TV, namely original programming, where the more direct subscription income could provide additional earmarked revenue for film distributors. It recognised that 'the potential value to the industry as a whole of exhibiting films through cable television outweighs any possible disadvantage to cinemas' (there is more than an echo here of the concern for the viability of bookshops in the discussions on the 'Net Book Agreement') and postponed to a later report the general problems of exhibitors, especially in relation to existing barring and other trade practices. Indeed, the report gives a strong impression of acceptance of subscription TV

(STV) as a major revenue earner for cinema films; and it proposes a clearly defined order of release for films through the various media: first, theatrical; then cable TV; then broadcast TV.

The interrelationship between the various distribution media was clearly of great concern, and the Committee recommends an adaptation of the CEA barring period for TV screening of cinema films so as to apply the same principle to cable transmission. It goes further, however, and recommends restrictions on cable transmission of sporting programmes and of short (less than 60 minutes) TV-originated programmes in order to protect live TV. The latter, indeed, illustrates the Committee's emphasis on STV as a programme-originating service rather than as mere rediffusion, and this part of the report should be read as not applying to the latter (it does in fact make a brief distinction between 'relay companies' and 'cable services', before going on to consider only the second).

The report is impressionistic rather than exhaustive in style. Because of its emphasis on the diffusion of theatrical features, it pays little attention to the potential of the larger, non-theatrical side of film production, nor does it consider the implications of the Post Office developing a 'common carrier' concept in its cable policy (as it already has done in relation to Prestel). This could have a profound impact on the method of control (including content control, i.e. censorship) of the organisation of programme services (satellite, STV) on which the Committee concentrated its attention. There is much food for thought in the report, but it is a starting point rather than the last word.

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

## Berlin Festival

*A selection from Gregor and de Hadeln's well co-ordinated, outwardly tranquil first year...*

Recollecting the commotion caused by last year's screening of *The Deer Hunter*, one was not surprised that the official United States entry to the thirtieth Berlin Festival—in its first year under the co-directorship of Moritz de Hadeln and Ulrich Gregor—was the classically uncontroversial *Heartland*, Richard Pearce's handsome, low-keyed saga of pioneering grit. A dash of American controversy was added, however, by the non-competitive appearance of William Friedkin's *Cruising*, an improbable, melodramatic thriller peopled largely by the homosexual patrons of New York's sado-masochistic dives. Had the festival mood been

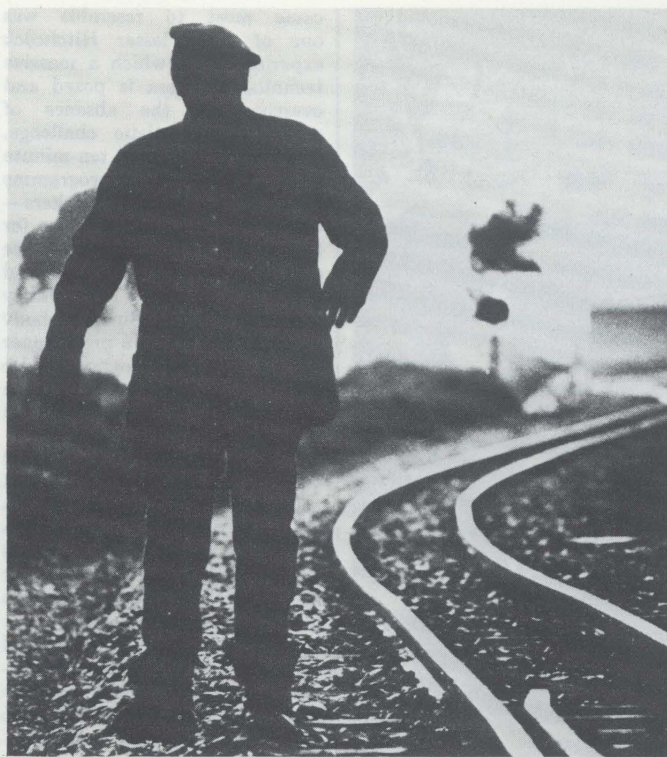


less benevolent, the full, expectant house at the Zoo Palast might have chosen to take offence at the manner in which a section of the homosexual community—whose tastes, incidentally, were well covered in a series of late-night Information screenings—had been traduced (as the Russians believed the Vietnamese had been traduced in Cimino's film). In the event, *Cruising* was greeted with mild hisses.

Despite some disparaging murmurs from the critics, *Heartland*, which took the main jury prize, turned out to be a work of modest but finely judged virtues. On the surface a straightforward feminist tract (produced by Wilderness Women Productions, Montana), Beth Ferris' script, adapted from family reminiscences and two autobiographical books by Elinore Stewart about the vicissitudes of homesteading in Wyoming before the First World War, sympathetically encompassed several broader issues: namely, that in inhospitable terrain people, rather than simply women, must cleave together, and that hardships are by the majority of mankind not so much bravely as matter-of-factly borne.

The theme of hardship long and matter-of-factly borne was treated with a very different tone by the actor-playwright Athol Fugard in Ross Devenish's Anglo-German co-production *Marigolds in August*. This piercingly brief moral tale, told from the point of view of two destitute Africans, is a companion piece to *The Guest* and *Boesman and Lena* (and, for sheer concentrated argument, I would judge it the best of the three). Although in some ways more a 'play' than a 'film', Fugard's schematic attack on the enervating effects of apartheid (indifference is the ruling emotion) is in fact worked out with surprising cinematic vigour. Michael Davis' photography of the scrubby environs of Schoenmakerskop, a white township near Port Elizabeth, eloquently conveys a sense of 'landscape', caught in a moment of dead time, as palpably intractable as the South African system of government itself.

A jobbing gardener, entrusted with the illogical task of planting marigolds in the chilly month of August, believes his precarious livelihood threatened by the arrival of a fellow-African, whom he unwarily and too cleverly induces into shop-breaking. Fugard, as the film's perhaps a shade too godlike mediator, edges the gardener, Daan, by long and roundabout argument into his first moment of self-realisation, thus enabling him to identify with his 'rival's' predicament. Fugard, who drew Daan's portrait from life, described his model as having 'the stature of a Lear'. And a significant element in this authentic tragedy is Daan's muscular stubbornness.



Athol Fugard and Ross Devenish's *'Marigolds in August'*.

*Chiedo Asilo* (No Child's Land or, as the director Marco Ferreri vainly hoped it would be titled in French, *Pipi Caca Dodo*) has several obvious points against it: from a central performance by Roberto Bengini, as an unorthodox schoolteacher, of parodic extravagance, to an irate confusion of intent which finally resolves itself in a jarring mystical flourish, in which the teacher and an autistic two-year-old, whom he has just induced to speak, are subsumed into the Mediterranean, the Universal Womb—as seen through a frog-filled aquarium. This said, however, and despite an anarchic waywardness—the slender narrative aims at proving that traditional kindergarten education is bunk—the film, co-scripted by Ferreri and Gérard Brach, has an overall genial spontaneity, which at times manages to be both perceptive and funny: at one point, for example, a donkey is brought into the playground, only to be as surprised by the children's bafflement as they are by its presence.

István Szabó's *Bizalom* (Confidence), a two-handed chamber drama acted with affecting understatement by Péter Andorai and, notably, Ildikó Bánsági, is set in Budapest between autumn 1944 and the Liberation. Treating the themes of mistrust, betrayal and enforced separation (even those who love each other find themselves unwilling strangers), Szabó's script traces the stages by which a man and a woman, both with separate families, and compelled to pose as a married couple in one room of a safe-house refuge, come half-pragmatically, half-emotionally to surrender the past to the exigencies of the present. The details of the

woman's attempt to preserve her private identity without betraying her fear, and of her companion's retreat from a faceless, slow-crumbling gruffness, are rendered with a poignant, wintry detachment against the authentic backdrop of an unseen war.

There were strong contenders in a mixed bag of documentaries in the Information section. Perhaps the most chilling was Jack Willis and Paul Landau's *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang*, a cautionary tale—told with little art but in the best traditions of American investigative journalism, and in this case with no thought for personal safety—about the effects and thinking behind the post-war nuclear tests in the Nevada desert. With the Three Mile Island disaster fresh in mind, it was salutary to be reminded by the journalist Paul Jacobs of the full extent of the military's cavalier ignorance of the weapons being tested. Inter-cut with interviews with the chronically ill victims of the tests (several of whom, including the cancer-ridden Jacobs, died before the film was completed) was US Army footage of luckless infantrymen exposed on training to an atomic blast and for protection merely turning their backs and shielding their eyes.

Although produced and directed by David Bradbury, *Frontline* really belonged to its subject, the Australian frontline cameraman Neil Davis who covered the Vietnam War for eleven years, for the most part in company with South Vietnamese combat units. Flecked with illuminating detail (the South Vietnamese and Cambodians—whose war Davis also covered— invariably went into action with

tiny Buddhas shut tight in their mouths), and compact with primary material about the day-to-day business of modern warfare, *Frontline* tackles, as honestly as any fiction or non-fiction film, that contentious subject the dreadful 'excitement' of (non-nuclear) warfare. Narrated with judicious disinterest by the bluffly unflappable Davis, the film constitutes a substantial and in many ways definitive record. It also has a powerful deterrent effect.

Of the new West German films, two stood out in contrast. *Deutschland bleiche Mutter*, directed by Helma Sanders-Brahms (who in 1977 made *Heinrich*, a similarly distended saga), traces the fate of a prosaic couple caught up in the Second World War and encapsulates—in the words of one German critic—'almost every cinematic cliché of the War.' Alexander Kluge's *Die Patriotin*, on the other hand, which approached a broader section of modern German history, adopted an almost wilfully outlandish method of address. The film, further investigations of the history teacher Gabi Teichert (Hannelore Hoger), who was last seen performing similar symbolic 'excavations' in *Deutschland im Herbst*, takes as its initial point of view the perspective of the knee of a German corporal killed at the Battle of Stalingrad.

Dr Kluge is restlessly anxious to re-pose the questions whose answers lead to the writing of history books. His kaleidoscopic technique (as broad, if not as technically adventurous as Syberberg's) encompasses interviews with delegates (and a possessed shorthand note-taker) at an SDP conference, through actuality footage of a singularly miscalculated raid on a department store, to Teichert's quaintly serious (and often very funny) attempts to test and probe daily life in the Federal Republic. She is described at one point—and with justice—as 'a wild mouse'.

The festival's widely liked stray was Les Blank's short film *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*. Having rashly bet young Erroll Morris that he would never complete a movie (Morris promptly realised his pet-cemetery project *Gates of Heaven*), Herzog came to Berkeley to eat one of his well-worn desert boots ('I hate cowards'). After a ceremonial stewing of the boot, the straight-faced Herzog, clearly relishing the self-publicity, appeared before an enthusiastic audience, discarded the rubber sole, and chewed his way through the upper, meanwhile fielding questions about his film-making beliefs ('Go out and steal a camera'). The other boot, plus the discarded sole, was subsequently preserved in a clear plastic block: an indication, perhaps, that there is more to film-making than finagling the finance.

JOHN PYM





A rare picture of Hitchcock's birthplace, the greengrocer's shop in Leytonstone. The man in uniform is his father; the boy on the pony probably his elder brother William.

## Perché Hitchcock?

*The Roman spring of Alfred Hitchcock: the director and the debates live on*

Alfred Hitchcock, to borrow a phrase, is now such an axiom of the cinema that mere mortality cannot be expected to dent his durability for audiences or his topicality for critics. His death, on 29 April, was of course the worst kind of harbinger for an international conference on his work, scheduled to take place in Rome the following week. But although his passing was acknowledged, by and large it was incidental to the issues being

thrashed out—or around—in the three-day event which convened critics from France, Italy and Britain, with a leavening of some of Hitchcock's professional associates. The only exception would be the critic who had decided, in the event, to change the topic of his paper from Hitchcock and America to Hitchcock and Death.

Looked at another way, however, this was just the kind of event liable to embalm even an artist in the bloom of his creative life. The occasion was certainly not lacking in financial or organisational resource, nor in a certain kind of seriousness: while the days were given over to earnest analysis, the evenings were devoted to screenings of the films. But if frivolousness was ruled out, so was any useful context for discussion. What the symposium

came most to resemble was one of those lesser Hitchcock experiments in which a massive technical problem is posed and overcome in the absence of any genuine artistic challenge. Compare the gruelling ten-minute takes of *Rope* with a programme in which six to eight speakers—without a pause in between for breath let alone discussion—are called upon each morning and afternoon to deliver their widely assorted theses. Since nobody could be as careful a pre-planner as Hitchcock, the programme also slipped quickly out of gear, and a backlog of speakers began to build ominously toward the last day.

Add to the Babel of critical voices that of the multi-lingual environment, with simultaneous earphone translations, and this supremely popular artist seemed to disappear into the most scrambled hieroglyphs. In lieu of any occasion for debate, vague discontent began to gather round the old issue of art versus entertainment, i.e. should so much be read into the work of a man who seemed to want only to manipulate and/or caress his audience. The unease was also evident in the panel of Hitchcock's collaborators, who seemed uncertain what their working reminiscences had to do with these abstruse and (as presented) self-sufficient speculations. Actors Tippi Hedren and Farley Granger, writer Ernest Lehman (who was working on the film, *The Short Night*, Hitchcock had been preparing before his final illness) and long-time production associate Peggy Robertson provided enthusiastic evidence of Hitchcock's practicality as a film-maker but refused to be drawn on his metaphysicality.

Not that there was much common ground between the critics, whose positions seemed to be defined less on critical lines than national ones. For the Italians, one issue that lurked in the background was why Hitchcock should have been the subject of such an expensive jamboree in the first place. The reason was assumed to be less disinterested scholarship than the rather complicated politics by which money (about £100,000 in this case) was kept flowing from the government of the Communist region to the cultural wing of the Socialist party. It was anomalous also that the event should have been held under the aegis of *Filmcritica* magazine and its editor, Edoardo Bruno, who to younger critics has always represented steadfast opposition to serious consideration of Hollywood directors like Hitchcock. One of the first Italian papers was a rambling confessional by a newspaper reviewer, who simply quoted from his dismissive comments on Hitchcock through the 50s, in apparent illustration of the failure of his generation, so steeped in neo-realism, to 'see' Hitchcock.

The French were more playful (but none the less serious), as witness Claude Beylie's paper on 'Hitchcock et la tradition grasse'—Hitchcock and food. Beylie not only produced a fascinating new theory (Hitchcock's worst films were made while he was on a diet, the delivery of the secret at the end of his plots is akin to vomiting, etc.), but told an anecdote about the director's childhood that had nothing to do with police stations: waking one night to find himself alone in the house, the young Hitchcock began crying in fear, while simultaneously seeking consolation in the pantry. The British contingent provided some revaluation of the English Hitchcock, most stimulatingly in Thomas Elsaesser's review of 'the dandy in Hitchcock', linking him with that art movement which rejected nineteenth century humanism for artifice, surface and patterning.

Surprisingly, for this writer at least, a synthesis of the above two papers was supplied in a chance (Hitchcockian?) encounter with actor David Opatoshu, who was holidaying in the same hotel and who told how, during the shooting of *Torn Curtain*, he was discovered by Hitchcock poring over his script at a midday break and chided ('David, it's only a game') for neglecting the important matter of lunch. RICHARD COMBS

## Feat off the Ground

*The Zoptic process and the secrets of Superman*

After the final day's shooting by the special 'flying unit' on *Superman II*, the Guild of British Camera Technicians was invited to Pinewood for an evening with Zoran Perisic, the flying unit's director. The secrets of Superman were at last to be revealed. Stage 'A' at Pinewood looked as though it would hold a jumbo jet. At one end of all the space was an unruly tower of girders and planks bearing Perisic, a cluster of television screens, and a dark, hooded construction. At the other was a floor-to-ceiling cyclorama extruding from its centre a pole on which was impaled, like some exotic insect, a miniature temple in the Palladian style. Scattered along the walls lay broken plaster corpses, apparent victims of some shameful celluloid massacre. A low murmur from the congregation at the tower's base indicated subdued revelry among members of the flying unit, as if a brief pause in the war could be interrupted by another skirmish at any moment.

'These cables aren't supposed to be here,' Perisic observed by way of welcome. He plucked at the loops and tentacles depending from his brainchild, a priest at



Ernest Lehman, Tippi Hedren at the Rome conference.



# THE ZOPTIC PROCESS • ANTONY BALCH

the altar of an eccentric idol. 'Make it do something,' he suggested to a distant acolyte, who fiddled obligingly with a row of knobs. The great shape buzzed and quivered, and the British Camera Technicians clutched at drinks and scaffolding and looked apprehensive.

On the television screens, all was suddenly plain. The temple became an elegant space vehicle, swooping among clouds over a mountain range. On the screens, it flew closer, turned away, skimmed into the distance; on the cyclorama, where the clouds were giant ghosts, the model merely rocked slightly. The image on the screens was repeated, at various speeds, captured on videotape and available for instant reassessment. It looked expensive, but startlingly simple. 'It is simple,' said Perisic.

A Yugoslav freelance cameraman, Zoran Perisic came to England in 1963, worked on *2001*, set up the rostrum camera department at Yorkshire Television, and invented the Zoptic process with the help of an equipment sale at Shepperton Studios. His theory was that with the use of zoom lenses, the front-projection system by which the camera films two images simultaneously could be transformed to give both depth and movement within the same shot. Surprisingly, nobody seems to have believed that it would work or, after Perisic's first demonstrations, that it would work in Scope. Suddenly given a ten-week trial period on *Superman*, Perisic stayed with the production for three years, improving the technique as he went along. With *Superman II*, he'd been able to achieve effects that just wouldn't have been possible with the makeshift gadgetry available for the first part of the story. The Zoptic assembly now combined extremely lightweight camera and projector units, capable of making complete 360-degree turns, with 10:1 Technovision anamorphic lenses giving increased brilliance and fluency of movement, everything remote-controlled. Pausing only to show his guests a couple of glimpses of Superman himself (waving at the camera above the Statue of Liberty and being attacked by a dead vulture on a piece of string), the inventor left to receive a technical achievement award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

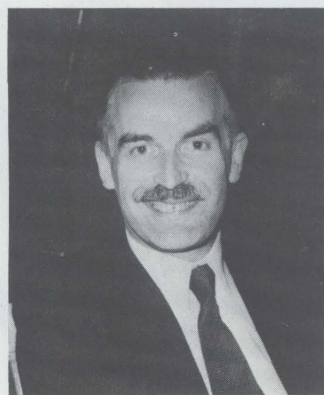
After the Pinewood evening, Perisic seemed to be everywhere, the Zoptic process unveiling itself in the trade press, the dailies, and on children's programmes on television. Superman's comfortless pose, on a moulded support at the end of a pole, revealed itself as somewhat less than magical. The producer of *Superman II*, Pierre Spengler, announced sadly: 'We made a kind of tacit agreement with the technicians that we would try to keep a certain mystery about how things were done,

but somehow Zoran felt that morally he was no longer bound to that.' Other members of the film's substantial special effects team expressed public regret that the Zoptic process was stealing all the glory when in fact Superman's flights had been achieved by all manner of means, including blue screens, black velvet, rotoscope mattes, models, and live action. And as the grumbles have mounted, it begins to seem that although Perisic has undoubtedly been quick off the ground his future may be up in the air.

PHILIP STRICK

## Antony Balch

Antony Balch, independent film-maker and distributor, died in April, aged 42



'Tony, you don't look too good—are you all right?' I asked Tony Balch at the BFI's last Christmas party. 'No, didn't you know? I'm dying,' he said. And he meant it. He never beat about the bush.

It seemed preposterous—it still does—that all that nimble energy could stop dead. There were few more joyful chance encounters in Wardour Street than with Tony hurtling about some new venture, thrusting some outrageous art work under your nose, declaiming a fearful title change, quoting with immense approval the words of Russ Meyer, 'I'm in this business for lust and profit.' No one took Tony's zestful performance as an abominable showman too seriously. His enthusiasm, warmth and sheer generosity made nonsense of the role. So, of course, did his record.

He began at sixteen as a production assistant on shorts, and became an editor. He directed a few advertising films, including some of the celebrated Camay commercials, and worked as a location aide in France on various features before becoming involved in subtitling such films as *Les Amants*, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Pickpocket*. He was responsible for publicising the London openings of many of the French new wave features of the 1960s.

The first avant-garde short he directed, *Towers Open Fire* (1963), was written and acted by

his friend William Burroughs. It was an intriguing but difficult work which attracted a certain notoriety—this was nearly twenty years ago—for the somewhat heady combination of showing its director wanking and being shot partly in the BFI Boardroom. His second short, *The Cut-Ups*, was also made with Burroughs and was arbitrarily chopped up and reassembled in imitation of one of Burroughs' literary techniques.

Tony reissued *Freaks* and *Witchcraft through the Ages*. He programmed what was the Times Baker Street for years with enormous flair and unpredictability, and seemed to enjoy his disasters as much as his triumphs. I remember how impressed he was that one afternoon nobody at all came to see *Yoko Ono No. 4*, the famous bottoms film. 'You'd think there'd be one, just to get out of the rain,' he said. He would evolve labyrinthine reasons why each new improbable venture—such as his acquisition of a Canadian feature on slimming which he intended to attract West End shoppers—simply had to work; and he would tell the world when people stayed away in droves.

He bemused the critics, testing their loyalty with such title changes as *Weird Weirido* (originally *Le Grand Cérémonial*), *Inside a Woman's Body* (*Corps Profond*) and *Doctor in the Nude* (*Traitement de Choc*). He claimed to have wanted to re-title Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* as *The Beast is not for Beating*. His own exploitation features, *Secrets of Sex* and *Horror Hospital*, were respectfully greeted by a press overwhelmed by the sheer improbability of this amazing one man band and his happy defiance of anything resembling good taste.

In recent years his releases included *Don't Deliver Us from Evil*, *L'Agression*, *Corpse Grinders*, *11,000 Virgins* (*Bisex-*

*ual*), *Truck Stop Woman*, *Super-vixens* and *Beneath the Valley of the Ultra Vixens*, each of them reflecting something of his own cheerful anarchy.

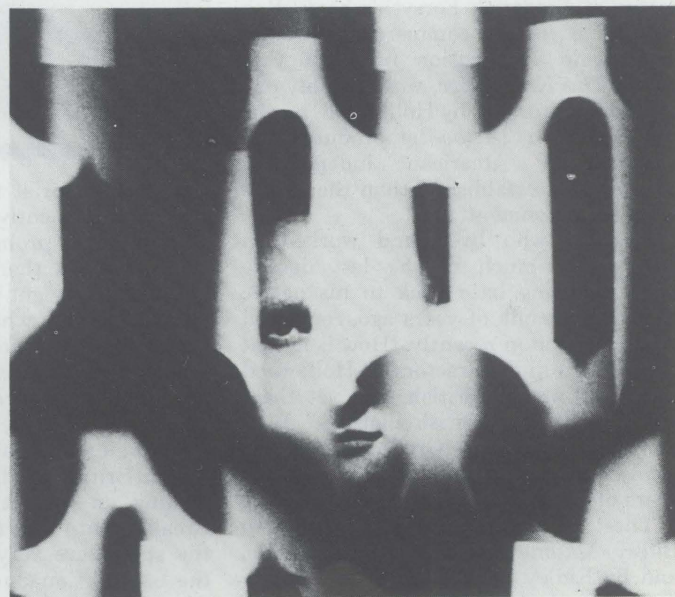
Tony was without guile, and was shattered when his trust in others was abused. He hated any kind of hypocrisy. Censors inspired him to a special fury, and he relished publicising their absurdities. But then he seemed to relish everything and everybody, lavishing time and attention and advice as if his own affairs were of no importance.

Suddenly I realise that my memories of Tony are all memories of aspects of his generosity: Tony disturbing his own dinner party at Cannes to help me when we heard the New Cinema Club had been evicted for trying to show *Quiet Days in Clichy*; Tony helping organise a picket of critics with placards reading, 'Support Enid Wistrich Now Or Repent Later.' His help was always instant and usually unconventional. Once I mentioned I'd soon be on to him for comps for his latest release. 'Take this instead,' he insisted, stuffing a couple of pounds into my pocket. 'It'll save me phoning the box office.'

He blew through committees like a tornado, invariably offering sizeable sums to buy space to promote the cause. Once he totally misinterpreted some paper presented by one of the BFI's more Machiavellian executives, trumpeting his support for the precise opposite of what the man actually wanted and innocently leaving him totally unnerved.

I'm sure there was an unhappier side to Tony which he made certain few people ever glimpsed. What we knew and loved was an ebullient tightrope walker who would leap down to lend a hand to anyone who needed it. An awful lot of people are going to miss all that gusto and kindness and fun.

DEREK HILL



'Towers Open Fire'.



# FINANCE FOR LOCAL TALENT

BY SIMON PERRY

A few months ago it was noted in the trade journal *Variety* that one-third of the thirty-three feature films financed by major Hollywood studios and currently in production around the world had first-time directors. Comparison with productions financed from 'independent' sources revealed a far lower degree of trust in talent new to features: only two out of fifteen pictures backed by non-majors had first-timers in the driving seat.

Still more remarkable, four out of the total of thirteen directors making their debuts at that time were British. Three were doing so as a result of Hollywood backing. Three (not the same three) had backgrounds mainly in commercials; one came from television. Two out of the three so-called British majors—EMI and Lord Grade's ITC, the Rank Organisation being the exception—were in production, but not employing home-grown tyros.

Twentieth Century-Fox was chancing \$6,000,000 on Graham Baker for *The Final Conflict*, a third instalment of the theme started with *The Omen*. The same studio had also put up half the money for Hugh Hudson to direct *Chariots of Fire* for producer David Puttnam. John Irvin, notable as the director of the BBC serial *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, had made the grade into features via Norman Jewison, who as executive producer of *Dogs of War* persuaded United Artists to entrust Irvin with the \$8,000,000 adaptation of Frederick Forsyth's book. Bob Brooks, a former commercials director who made a television film last year called *The Knowledge*, was the only one not directly funded by Hollywood, but he was hired on *Tattoo* by producer Joe Levine, an American independent scarcely less established than the Hollywood establishment.

Jewison, who lived and worked in Britain for much of the last decade before shifting base back to his native Canada a couple of years ago, remarked while in London recently: 'How is it that the hot group of directors in Hollywood right now are all British, and yet there are virtually no British pictures? Why don't EMI and Lew Grade finance the local talent? Whatever happened to fifty years of British film-making experience?'

The trail blazed by Alan Parker with *Bugsy Malone* and *Midnight Express*, and by Ridley Scott with *The Duellists* and *Alien*, has led to an appreciation of

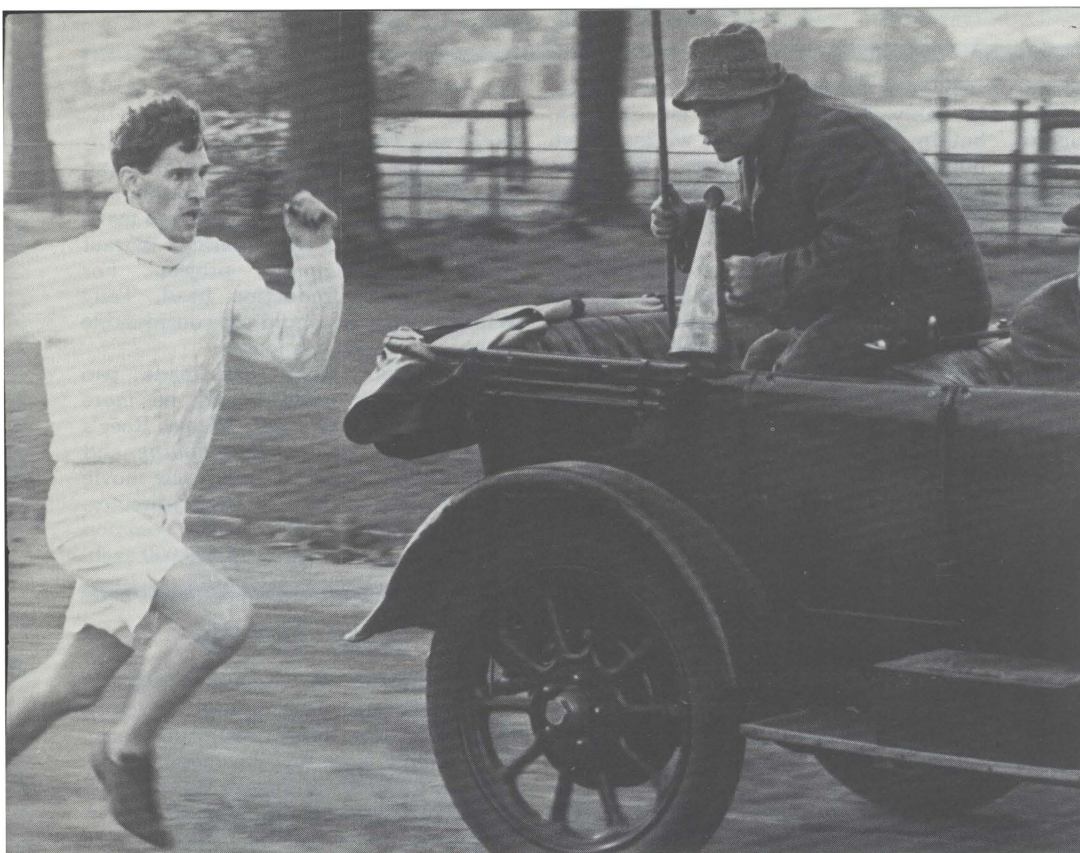


British directorial talent by Hollywood production executives that is now peaking. There has probably never been more incentive than there is at this moment for Britain's bright young film-makers to go west, joining what the National Film Finance Corporation's managing director, Mamoun Hassan, calls 'not a brain drain, but a soul drain'.

On the face of it, what is there to stay for? The preoccupation of all the heavyweight British production houses is with making an impact in North America. Breaking into that foreign market where the stakes are very high—returns from the US and Canada represent more than fifty per cent of potential world gross—is

inevitably fraught with high risks for British outfits, however solvent. It is only to be expected that the heads of leading local companies should be reluctant to compound their insecurity by taking on untried directors. That must apply equally, if not more so, to newer distributors-turned-producers such as Hemdale and Brent Walker. Each of the three 'biggies' conducts its film-making activities with a discernibly different emphasis, but the effect is the same: a British company that still has to prove itself across the water can have only limited scope for including unknown quantities in a 'package' assembled and budgeted with an American release in mind, and





## NEW FILMS BY BRITISH FIRST-TIME DIRECTORS

far left

### Babylon

Youth movie 1: blacks in London, violence on the streets, and an 'escape' through reggae. Director: Franco Rosso.

Brinsley Forde as DJ Blue.

top left

### Chariots of Fire

The story of Harold Abrahams, British runner in the 1924 Olympics. Scripted by Colin Welland; directed by Hugh Hudson.

Ben Cross as Abrahams, Ian Holm as his trainer.



bottom left

### Breaking Glass

Youth movie 2: punk rock and the music business. First feature by TV director Brian Gibson.

Hazel O'Connor as punk rocker.

one of those unknowns is very unlikely to be the man who spends the money.

In fact, reflecting the confidence EMI has been gaining in the US market over the last two years, the company may take a risk this autumn with a new British director, Peter Webb, yet another talent trained in commercials. He is due to take the helm of a medium-budget feature called *Comrades*. But until now, the policy adopted since Barry Spikings took control of EMI's production has not favoured film-making in Britain except with strict safeguards. The star-packed Agatha Christie whodunits, EMI's principal local activity of late, were placed in the proven hands of Sidney Lumet,

John Guillermin and (on the latest, *The Mirror Crack'd*, currently before the cameras) Guy Hamilton. New, or newish, directors have been used only where EMI has stood behind a film as a distributor alongside a Hollywood company, as on *The Awakening* with Orion, which television director Mike Newell handled, and on *The Elephant Man* with Paramount, which had *Eraserhead* director David Lynch in charge.

With EMI's ability to give fresh talent a break inseparable from the success of its product in America, it's to be hoped that the next features released will maintain the prestige and commercial profile developed with *The Deer Hunter*, *Driver*

and *Convoy*. The prospects at this point seem fair to middling. Shooting of *The Jazz Singer* remake and *Honky Tonk Freeway* reportedly went far from smoothly, though results of course are what count. It's also to be hoped that Thorn's takeover of EMI will have the effect of giving Spikings more rather than less financial leeway to take a long-term view if any of the new titles fail at the box-office. Another one on the way is producer Allan (Grease) Carr's disco musical, *Can't Stop the Music*, which incidentally fielded an American director new to features, Nancy Walker. For British would-be directors, EMI's present stance is provisionally encouraging.



Where Spikings has built an initial reputation for delivering successes, Lord Grade's longer track record is a string of non-hits, with the exception of *The Muppet Movie*, which fared rather patchily worldwide but did earn well in the States. Because Grade's policy is based on pre-sales, the films generally don't rate as flops on ITC's books: it's the distributors who pick them up in advance that carry the can. The presale mentality, as evidenced by Grade, demonstrates more and more persuasively that chucking however many expensive ingredients into a tepid container does not result in cordon bleu cooking. And as pursuit of that elusive winner leads the dauntless entrepreneur more hectically into what the jargon calls the megabuck league (*Raise The Titanic* was due to cost \$33,000,000 at the latest count), the need to limit risks becomes ever more pressing. The legacy of *The Boys from Brazil*, *Movie Movie*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Cassandra Crossing* and *Escape to Athena*, to name not all that have come and quickly gone, is a reduction of flexibility and opportunities to experiment. More of the same, only bigger, is the order of the day. *Capricorn One*, creative expansion nil.

It therefore goes without saying that at the high-priced end of his operation Grade cannot afford to go scouting for

## Spin-offs

prentice craftsmen. Several satellite companies, however, with a brief to turn out low-budget films for television and cinema exhibition, have been launched during the last couple of years as part of Grade's Associated Communications Corporation empire (ACC, which comprises both ITC and ATV), and these do have the look of platforms on which freshmen should be able to get a features footing. So far the objectives of Black Lion Films, Inner Circle and Chips Productions have been chiefly to make cinema spin-offs of successful television series—*Porridge*, *Rising Damp*, *George & Mildred*; and movies-for-television, such as *Bloody Kids*, *Very Like a Whale* and *The Shillingbury Blowers*. The directors involved have commonly been experienced grafters who have never quite achieved the prominence some of them deserve: Stephen Frears, Joe McGrath, Val Guest, Alan Bridges, John Mackenzie.

The last-named made a fine picture for Black Lion called *The Long Good Friday*, but the uncertainty surrounding its future at the time of writing—that is, whether it should be pitched at the theatrical market or simply played on television—is symptomatic of the opposing schools of thought present in all wholly-owned film subsidiaries of ITV companies. Others, incidentally, are Euston Films (Thames TV) and Southern Pictures (Southern TV). An ITV contractor can write off production costs incurred by a subsidiary against the annual commercial television levy only if the films made are broadcast in the UK, not if they go on cinema release. (How they are exploited overseas is irrelevant.) *Porridge* did so

well as a cinema film that its returns probably outweighed the levy burden, but in the case of a film with no such built-in theatrical audience, like *The Long Good Friday*, a decision between the two possible exhibition routes is much more of a gamble.

The prevailing drift is to go for levy avoidance. Mark Shivas, creative director of Southern Pictures, described the company's first venture—*Richard's Things*, a feature-length adaptation of Frederic Raphael's book, directed by Anthony Harvey (no newcomer) and starring Liv Ullmann—as 'a film for theatrical and television release worldwide, on which Southern Television will have first option in the UK.' Euston Films, Black Lion and Inner Circle will apparently concentrate on series production and TV movies henceforth. The sole exception is ACC's Chips Productions, which apart from the *George & Mildred* spin-off, has financed two features this year, *Hawk The Slayer* and *The Monster Club*. Again, the directors are pretty safe bets: Peter Frazer-Jones directed *George & Mildred* on television; Terence Marcel made two film versions of stage plays for impresario Ray Cooney before writing *Hawk The Slayer* with independent producer Harry Robertson; and Roy Ward Baker, hired for *The Monster Club*, is a veritable veteran.

Thus the television satellites, in the early ambivalent stages of their development, have at best provided some useful opportunities for fledged but unrecognised directors to make films partly aimed at the big screen. So far so good, but no real chances taken. Since the profitable ITV companies represent a potential film financing force comparable with the majors, it can be hoped that they will see mileage in maintaining a level of arm's length production, so that the best proving ground for feature directors—the low-budget area, which is outside the majors' ken—is kept viable with the help of the telly. The more regularly viable it's seen to be, the more likely it is to start accommodating new talent.

The impending fourth channel is strongly relevant in this context, and access or otherwise to its airwaves by independent producers is already the subject of much speculation and energetic lobbying. A fair prediction at this distance from its (unconfirmed) introduction late in 1982 would seem to be simply that the solidly financed independent producing organisations will be in the best position to offer a springboard to aspiring feature film-makers, by being able to cradle risky one-off movie projects between safer series material and the like. That's always assuming the heads of such organisations want to bother. But some commitment to the notion was expressed by Graham Benson when he took over as head of the new UK television division of the Robert Stigwood Group. 'My personal taste is in making inexpensive British movies for TV,' he vouchsafed, and he has the money to do it.

Returning to the major film companies, it is not easy to judge from the Rank Organisation's recent production pattern

just how it might have invested in the future.\* Remakes of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*, and indifferent titles such as *Wombling Free* and *The Riddle of the Sands*, were followed eighteen months ago by a resolve to make a serious pitch at the American market with British-originated projects. For those, Rank's production head, Tony Williams, said he would set considerable store by 'a handsome look'.

Since then, Rank has made two features which could hardly be more different from each other: Nicolas Roeg's extravagantly personal *Bad Timing*, and *Silver Dream Racer*, a motorcycle movie squarely aimed by its writer-director, David Wickes, at the lowest common denominator. At roughly \$5,000,000 each,

## Idle funds

both might seem hard-pressed to return their costs, and Rank's distribution arm has a couple more slow-business acquisitions on its hands in *Eagle's Wing* (which merited better) and *The Human Factor*. In fact it must be reckoned the least able of the local majors to take creative risks, with least experience of the US market.

It was initially heartening to learn earlier this year that Williams had \$40,000,000 earmarked for UK production over the next twelve months. But, queried as to what projects were in the pipeline, he stated that \$30,000,000 was the correct figure, and admitted that apart from a spin-off feature (to be produced by Beryl Vertue of Robert Stigwood) of the television series *Shoestring* which he hoped to have rolling by the end of the year, nothing else was in active preparation for the period in question. With some \$25,000,000 therefore going begging, Williams attributed Rank's inactivity to the lack of suitable British subjects presented to him for financing. The closest Rank came to backing an unknown name was two years ago, when it took up, but subsequently abandoned, a film Stephen Weeks was to direct called *Bengal Lancers*.

That the one leading British company with a declared intention to make pictures here should have such ample funds lying idle, while Hollywood is snapping up one new British director after another, must be seen as one of the more bizarre anomalies of the business. But Rank's image within the industry has been rather confused, and it can be no surprise if well-travelled independent producers—who since the demise of the studio system have provided the main dynamic of the industry by putting projects together,

**\*STOP PRESS:** This article was at page-proof stage when on 5 June the Board of Rank announced that 'having seen inflation and interest rates climbing' and concluded that 'it now takes too long to recoup money on films,' it had decided to cease film-making forthwith. Here, Simon Perry presciently fills in some of the background to this loss-cutting decision.

— Editor.





**The Elephant Man:** John Hurt in the adaptation of the book by Sir Frederick Treves, filmed in Britain by American David Lynch.

then seeking to build a relationship with an American or British major—tend to look warily at the company.

Rank's published accounts tend to be sparsely detailed, and the most recent set, for the fiscal year ended 31 October 1979, initially included no breakdown of the film production, distribution and exhibition divisions' performance. It was clear, though, that the Xerox interest, which showed pre-tax profits of more than \$232,000,000, was the main contributor to the group's improved results overall, with the hotel chain also doing nicely. Net income for the year was up about 12 per cent to \$176,609,000. Later a supplementary profit-and-loss sheet revealed a deficit of just under \$3,500,000 on the film side, and a provision for further losses of more than \$5,000,000 on current releases already noted.

Visible disjunction between the distribution and exhibition arms of the company was required by the Monopolies Commission, but conferring between the production and distribution divisions is permitted, and agreement on the part of the distribution side to handle a film's release has been a prerequisite of Williams' undertaking to finance production. Without lingering on some industry opinion as to the marketing expertise of

the distribution side, it suffices to say that as Rank's Odeon cinemas constitute one of the two circuits dominating the British market (300 screens each, give or take a few, mostly on key sites, out of approximately 1,500 in all), release of a Rank-produced film is gravely inhibited if the exhibition division refuses to play it. (The direct competitor, EMI's ABC circuit, is hardly likely to come to the

### A man with no money

rescue.) But that is exactly what happened with *Bad Timing*, for example, which had to be committed to the Classic chain of fewer, and far less well-placed, theatres. Unfortunately, a film's performance in the home market does influence overseas sales, even though in cash terms a UK release has lost much of its former significance.

In that and other ways, the Roeg film caused deep contention within the Rank Organisation. The film's content reportedly appalled certain members of the board, and reactions throughout the company—which was founded on a Methodist tradition, it should be

remembered, and has a long-standing reputation for delivering 'family' pictures—ranged from welcoming *Bad Timing* as a much-needed departure, to recommending removal of the man with the gong from its leader.

In the wilderness of caution observable among the principal sources of film finance in Britain over the last eighteen months, one voice has continued to cry the cause of new blood. For a man with virtually no money, Mamoun Hassan of the NFFC has developed a remarkably high profile in the industry since he took over from Sir John Terry at the beginning of last year. Put into the job by the Labour government, with promises that the NFFC would be refinanced to the tune of some £5,000,000 and encouraged to take a stronger lead (i.e. more risks) in promoting a British cinema than hitherto, Hassan found the whole basis of his appointment dismantled within months by the incoming Conservative administration. Where Labour accepted the need for state support for the industry, to cushion it against the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't caprices of American financing, and had been moving steadily towards the setting up of a comprehensive British Film Authority,



Tory economic policies counted the movie business as of minimal importance, and seemingly equated the plight of the NFFC—which had consistently lost money during the thirty years of its existence—with that of a lame duck.

Terry pointed out frequently before his retirement that the system of Treasury loans by which the NFFC has traditionally been funded was more often than not unrealistic for the task it was expected to perform. Most of the losses incurred over the years were represented by an inability to meet the Treasury's interest charges on those loans: if interest had not been charged (and had not therefore had to be passed on to the films backed)—if, in fact, the system had been one of standard equity investment—then Terry estimated the cost to the taxpayer of the NFFC's investments in 750 features, and as many shorts and television films in the early days, would have been no more than £70,000 a year. Historically the Corporation never had more than a 50 per cent share in a film, and often simply provided the last dollop required to secure majority finance from an American or British distributor; but it frequently made the difference between a film—particularly one with unproven

NFFC, which signalled a departure even during Terry's time—the issue of the Corporation's coffers was kept alive. *The Europeans* did spectacular business in London and New York; *Black Jack* was a disaster locally, though more appreciated in France. Out of its last remaining resources, the NFFC stumped up more than 80 per cent of the production cost

## Films Bill

of *Babylon*, a fervently British picture with a budget of around £400,000 and a new director, Franco Rosso. Then a make-do-and-mend Films Bill, to wipe out £11,000,000 of unpaid debts to the Treasury and give the NFFC £1,000,000 by way of government grant, plus at least £1,500,000 annually from the Eady box-office levy, was mooted and finally published this Easter. At the time of writing, the bill has all its parliamentary fences to jump, but it could be law by the end of the year.

In which case, a committed financier of fresh talent will be open for business on home ground, even if the funds at its disposal will not allow it to be nearly as forceful a marketer of its own product as Hassan would like. As for the criteria he will apply to select that product, in the NFFC's recent annual report he swiped equally at the Corporation's mandate which requires purely commercial assessment of projects submitted to it, and at suspicions held by some in the industry that his own tastes are purely artistic and impractical: 'It is a common misconception that "commercial" films make money—most of them do not. So the term "commercial" defines an attitude rather than a realistic expectation of returns. As for "art" films, there are too many which are so defined only by the makers of the films themselves... Most film-makers operate in the indefinable area in between.' And he stated at the time the report was published: 'Distinction between art and commerce is a nonsense, and a pernicious one. I have never put a project to my board that I don't think will win—artistically and commercially—and I never will.'

Even with the Films Bill enacted, the NFFC will continue to be dependent on investment partners. It seems almost certain these will increasingly come from outside the film industry, since recent projects undertaken with Hollywood studios have not been profitable, and Hassan's view of co-operation with EMI, ITC or Rank is if anything more leery than theirs of finding common ground with him. Last year the signs were hopeful of a concerted inclination towards film investment from various previously hesitant non-industry quarters, but the picture has since become much more confused.

Most prominently, an Inland Revenue ruling of last August, which applied 100 per cent immediate tax write-off to film production costs as a capital allowance, and which seemed likely to encourage new interest in film investment among

individuals and companies with excess profits, had its potential effect severely dampened by this year's Finance Bill. Under the new leasing laws such write-off is now available only to *bona fide* film companies, not to companies or individuals whose main source of income is some other activity. That has also shut down, at one stroke, a number of routes by which banks and other City institutions—notoriously recalcitrant when it comes to film, and still smarting from certain past experiences—might have been drawn legitimately, and more actively than at present, into the arena. (Most now confine their involvement to safe advancement of money against pre-sale contracts.) Further, a tax-related scheme which provided backing for six features, made by the redoubtable independent producer Don Boyd, is currently the subject of an Inland Revenue enquiry, and thus dormant.

The music industry is something of a tentative white hope. Ironically perhaps, in the face of an overall dive in the fortunes of the major record companies, a few independents are making suck-it-and-see moves into films with the winnings the pop roulette game still throws up. As the winnings get bigger, but far chancier, so the incentive is also bigger to diversify into a field which need be no more chancy and to which the marketing techniques of the music business can be seen as readily applicable. Although the incentive is obvious enough when music is an integral part of a film (Robert Stigwood's returns on *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease* proved that the combination of a film and a disc can be greater than the sum of its parts), it is significant that Chrysalis Records, to which the smash-hit act, Blondie, is signed, initially invested in *Babylon* without taking rights in the soundtrack

## Hollywood annexe?

talents involved—going into production or going on to the shelf.

Even in Terry's latter days, when he was fiercely accused of passivity while the industry was dying on its feet, he directed the NFFC to make vital investments in *Bugsy Malone* (with Rank, hooray the day) and *The Duellists* (with Paramount), without which Parker, Scott and others now benefiting from Hollywood's pro-British craze might still be churning out commercials.

There was some truth, however, in the taunt that by generally insisting on the participation of a major distributor in the pictures it backed, the NFFC under Terry was merely endorsing the transatlantic-angled view of projects—in terms of both content and cost—which had brought British cinema to its knees and stifled so much local creativity. Part of Hassan's ticket when running for office as Terry's successor was that a reversal of that trend could still be viable, although it was clear he would need room to fail in order to have a chance of ultimately proving the point. When he arrived in the hot seat to discover not only that the NFFC's 'commercial investment' brief was likely to narrow, rather than broaden (since any new funds the Tories permitted were bound to be far less than Labour had had in mind), but also that the British majors had less interest than ever in co-financing low-budget indigenous movies with unknown directors, it seemed as if Britain might as well accept once and for all the status of Hollywood's annexe, and be grateful.

But Hassan refused to lie down, and with the appearance of James Ivory's *The Europeans* and Ken Loach's *Black Jack*—both majority-financed by the

## Allied angels

(although the label did subsequently acquire them under a separate, unconditional deal). Chrysalis has since stated a firm intention to continue financing films, with or without a music angle.

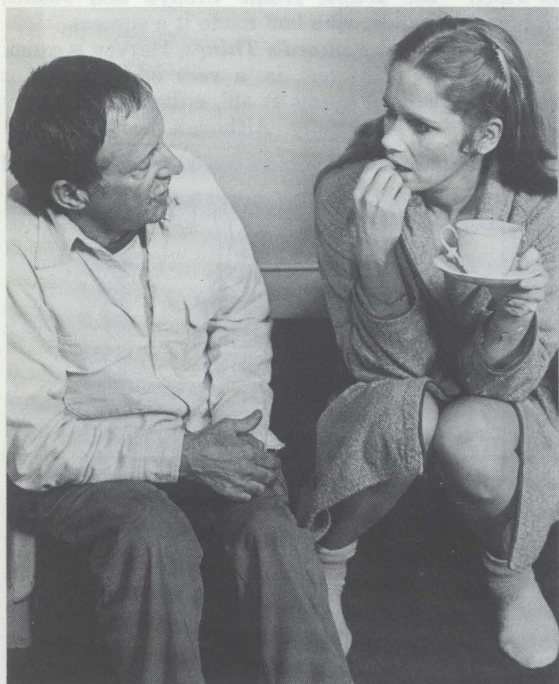
Possibly the single most encouraging new apparition on the bleak British filmscape is a company called Allied Stars, started by the young owner of a Liberian shipping line with a personal ambition to make pictures. So far Dodi Fayed has put up \$3,000,000 for *Breaking Glass* (the whole budget), which marked television director Brian Gibson's move into features, and is co-financier of *Charlots of Fire* with 20th Century-Fox. But it must be a matter of doubt how many other such angels might consider establishing a base in Britain (Allied Stars plans to maintain offices in Los Angeles and at Pinewood Studios), even if they exist. As long as the major production houses here look fixedly westward, and leave it to others to give young pretenders a chance, it's hardly surprising that, in Mamoun Hassan's words, 'film-makers here all seem to be working to get that Hollywood visiting card.'



# ON LOCATION: MAIDENHEAD AND EASTBOURNE

The following location reports from Maidenhead and Eastbourne on two films to be seen on television later in the year—*Richard's Things*, written by Frederic Raphael and directed by Anthony Harvey for Southern Pictures, and *Cream in My Coffee*, written by Dennis Potter and directed by Gavin Millar for Pennies from Heaven Ltd—indicate new strategies being adopted by British

film-makers anxious to overcome the perennial difficulties of the stalled distribution of their works and the restrictions imposed by working within the corporate structures of British television. The closer links outlined here between television companies and independent, or semi-independent production companies are examined from a different viewpoint elsewhere in the issue by Simon Perry.



'Richard's Things': Anthony Harvey and Liv Ullmann; Liv Ullmann 'caressing Richard's huge illuminated visage'.

## MAIDENHEAD

### *Richard's Things*

'Creative differences' on the set of *Richard's Things*, the first feature from Southern Television's new subsidiary, Southern Pictures, were of the understated, English kind. Director Anthony Harvey was mapping out a scene in which, shortly after Richard's funeral (the film begins with his sudden death by heart attack), his wife is sitting in a black slip before her tripled, slightly tilted reflection ('a little bit of madness') in dressing-table mirrors. She removes from her purse a bunch of fuchsias and a card inscribed 'Love' left by an unknown hand at her husband's funeral, then methodically clips up the flowers with a pair of scissors. Harvey indicated that he wanted a cut to the scissors ('the murder weapon') when the drawer is opened;

director of photography Freddie Young suggested that the whole sequence could be contained in one camera movement, and Harvey acquiesced. Later, having taken time off while the shot was being prepared, he excused himself to return to the upstairs bedroom, then resumed the interview, slightly embarrassed but mostly pleased that he had insisted on the cut. ('It's like saying I want to live in a room with a very pale cream wall. And you can't explain that to anyone, it's just you, your instinct.')

But then filming generally seemed to flow in a politely amiable fashion, in a large riverside house in Maidenhead, where the afternoon's shooting consisted of small pieces with Kate Morris (Liv Ullmann), alone after Richard's death, and her chilling discovery that she may not have been his most precious 'thing'. The mood is worth remarking, perhaps, because as Harvey noted, film-making relationships are often 'love/hate', and this was towards the end of a tight six-week schedule that was then being over-run by four days. The inconveniences, too, had been peculiarly English: this overcast day in late April should have been spent on a picnic scene instead of indoors, but it was easy to be deceived by promises of 'glorious sort of Renoir weather', and the expected quiet of Maidenhead had been consistently upset by rearranged flight paths ('When the

Queen is in Windsor, everything has to be diverted').

*Richard's Things*, in fact, heralds an English scheme to attempt something analogous to the funding of the 'New German Cinema' by television. Southern Pictures was formed in 1979 and now has a slate of six projects which, when completed, will be offered first to Southern Television for screening in Britain but will simultaneously be available for theatrical release abroad (and perhaps later in Britain). By a coincidence which is not so much ironic as inevitable in the film world, a major shareholder in Southern Television is the Rank Organisation, whose remarkable lack of interest in those productions of their own which are less than orthodox has meant the virtual burial of Harvey's recent film, *Eagle's Wing*. Mark Shivas, 'Creative Director' of Southern Pictures, is producing *Richard's Things*, an adaptation by Frederic Raphael of his own novel, now some seven years old, and something which he and Shivas have wanted to turn into a film since their success on television with *The Glittering Prizes*.

The emphasis here, despite the restricted schedule (on a budget of just under £1 million) and the confined aspect of the material (described as a 'two-hander' between Kate and the younger woman she turns up in her deceased husband's life), is very much on making



a film, and several of the crew have worked with Harvey before. With the other projects in Southern Pictures' bag, film and television seem to be catered for in about equal proportions. An eight-part series is planned on *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years*, written by the Highlands historian and novelist John Prebble, and a four-part series on the blues singer Alberta Hunter. A film to be made in association with the New Zealand Film Commission recreates the killing spree of Stanley Graham in that country in 1941, and *Audacity to Believe* (a project Shivas brought with him from the BBC) reconstructs the case of Sheila Cassidy, the English nurse (possibly to be played by Geraldine Chaplin) who was tortured in Chile for treating a wounded revolutionary. At the moment, Shivas is also involved in a massive BBC series on the Borgias ('the papacy as multinational

corporation') which will continue the historical revaluation of much-maligned Lucrezia. If this material necessarily sounds something of a compromise, and unlikely to produce a 'New British Cinema' in a hurry, it shows a healthy diversity, and Shivas evidently enjoys the autonomy to select his own subjects.

The in-between status of *Richard's Things* is fitting, in another way, in the career of Anthony Harvey, who has shown an English predilection for the theatrical subject and a decidedly un-English talent for invigorating it with cinematic force and style, mixed in with his more eccentric movie subjects which seem to have been dogged by problems of production or distribution (*They Might Be Giants*, *Eagle's Wing*). He has even managed to make exciting cinema out of the tennis matches in *Players*,

when all about him has lost any sense of purpose. This project caught him at another in-between stage, when he had just about moved to New York (other possibilities on hand include a film with Katharine Hepburn and one with the Fondas, Jane and Henry). His eagerness for *Richard's Things*, especially Raphael's script, may also be a reaction away from the less happy aspects of *Players*—a package without a core, particularly a script—and a compensation for his failure to get *The Gin Game*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning play about two people in an old folk's home, which the author refused to sell out of loyalty to the actors, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, who had made it a success.

But *Richard's Things*, Harvey is quick to point out, is 'a very odd piece, not what it seems at all', either dramatically or logistically. Although he has filmed

## EASTBOURNE

### *Cream in My Coffee*

In 1934, young Bernard Wilsher (Peter Chelsom), the son of a prosperous retailer, is summoned from an illicit holiday at a grand hotel on the South Coast by news of his father's death. Seated on a sofa in disarray, Bernard brushes aside the comforting hand of his companion Jean (Shelagh McLeod). Later, at a railway station, Jean kindly, but prematurely, assumes she has a role as a member of the family. Bernard, however, spurns her. It is not 'her place' to be at his side. Bernard's mother believes Jean, whom she considers an unsuitable girl, a Post Office employee, to be on holiday in the Lake District ('with Gillian and her bloody horsey Girl Guides'). How, in the circumstances, could Jean know of his father's death?

Offence is given with peevish, peculiarly English, middle-class obliqueness throughout Dennis Potter's *Cream in My Coffee*, in which these scenes occur. Forty-five years on, Jean and Bernard, who did marry, return to the hotel for a bleak convalescent holiday. The action crosscuts between the past and present. Bernard (Lionel Jeffries), by now a disgruntled, four-square killjoy, has over the years neutralised all resistance to his beastliness in his once chatterbox wife (Peggy Ashcroft). Inured herself to his rudeness, she is nevertheless forever attempting to shield others from its effects.

Watching television rushes in late April in a suite at Eastbourne's hugely sumptuous Grand Hotel (the location of *Cream in My Coffee*), Lionel Jeffries comments on the expanse of the hotel



On the beach at Eastbourne: Gavin Millar with Peggy Ashcroft and Lionel Jeffries.

dining-room in which, at one moment, he and Peggy Ashcroft find themselves the sole guests. 'My God, the loneliness of the place.' Uniformed waitresses linger in the background. A waiter is ceremoniously preparing *crêpes suzettes*. He gives a plate to Jean, who instinctively responds to his slightly phoney flourish. Bernard mumbles quite audibly that he hopes the pudding's better than the main course. Jean immediately covers: he suffers from indigestion. 'Oh, dear,' the waiter says. 'Such a pity.' Bernard snaps the trap: 'I can see how concerned you are. Breaks your warm Italian heart, doesn't it?' 'Sir?' the waiter asks, affecting not to understand. 'Never mind,' Bernard replies with a sort of shrivelled dismissiveness, 'Get on with it.'

Written by Potter after a family holiday at the Grand—'a huge white wedding-cake of a five-star hotel... a grand Victorian mausoleum'—*Cream in My Coffee* is a half-humorous, half-wistful and wholly bitter examination of the consequences of a vengeful decision. Young Bernard's proposal to Jean, which comes when Mrs. Wilsher reveals that he has not duped her over the purpose of

his holiday, is hardly a gesture of love, more a thumbed nose at his mother. The truth of the matter, of course, is that Jean is not—as the Sam Browne song of the 30s has it—'the cream in his coffee'. As an old man, Bernard might, ironically, 'be lost without her' (their lives having become irrevocably moulded); but that, again, was not what the lyricist had in mind. Potter upends the song's sentiments: certainty is out, and self-delusion is the youngsters' game. The subterfuge, as one would expect from Potter, is buried deep and artfully concealed.

*Cream in My Coffee*, directed by Gavin Millar (his first television feature since the Arena Cinema series) and photographed by Ernest Vincze (*Roseland*), is one of six new Dennis Potter plays which will be shown by London Weekend Television in the autumn. They are part of a ten-play deal (each production costing some £250,000) struck between LWT and Pennies from Heaven Ltd., the independent production company formed by Potter and his long-time producer Kenneth Trodd. The package will include two plays by Jim Allen to be directed by Roland Joffé (the team that produced



plays, such as *The Glass Menagerie*, in even shorter time, that was 'four characters and two sets, and this is endless . . . much more complicated than anything I've ever done, certainly in six weeks. *Eagle's Wing* I thought was very tough because of the desperate physical surroundings, but this I found more challenging because it's more concentrated in terms of its shifting moods.' The story, which principally concerns the relationship that develops between the wife and the younger woman, he compares in tone to Hitchcock or Patricia Highsmith, 'because you always think that something quite desperate is going to happen. I think when people go through a great loss, of somebody they've loved for twenty years, you have a sort of temporary insanity. There's a real element of danger, because she has this girl very much under her power, but the roles

change, and she suddenly finds herself the victim.'

With the casting of Liv Ullmann, one thing that has had to be changed, of course, is the Englishness of the central character, although the Hitchcockian conception remains the same: 'Kate Morris is a rather proper, nice, middle-class woman who suddenly begins to wonder if her life wasn't quite what it seemed.' Liv Ullmann, apparently, is in every scene of *Richard's Things*, and despite Harvey's insistence on doing the flowers-and-scissors sequence his way ('People are always giving you marvellous ideas, but you have to make your own stupid mistakes'), he happily accepted some significant touches added by the actress in the course of the afternoon. The black slip in that first scene was her idea, as was the *Persona*-like moment when, after watching slides of her hus-

band and family on the bedroom wall, and caressing Richard's huge illuminated visage, she curled up in a foetal position on the couch beneath.

Harvey, in fact, eagerly attributed both the mood of the film, a familiar claustrophobia, and his unit's working rapport to the atmosphere of the house that had become the Morris home after the real owners had temporarily vacated. 'There's something about being on location in a room that has been lived in. We came here and hit it off wonderfully for the first two weeks, a wonderful family feeling.' In a subsequent location, however, there had been two suicides shortly before the unit's arrival. 'It was very unhappy shooting there. We had a horrible time, we didn't like each other and it was very unsettling. It was very peculiar that place, I think it definitely was haunted.'

RICHARD COMBS



'Cream in My Coffee': Peggy Ashcroft and Lionel Jeffries.

*The Spongers*); one written and directed by Ken Campbell; and another by an as yet uncommissioned writer, possibly—according to Trodd—on an Irish subject. Potter has completed three of his plays, *Rain on the Roof*, directed by Alan Bridges, and *Blade on the Feather*, to be directed by Richard Loncraine, being the other two. Ideas for the other three remain fluid: in the air, Trodd says rather reluctantly (since ideas in the air have a tendency to evaporate), is a play featuring a meeting between Charles Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen.

This is the first deal of its kind between LWT and an independent production company for a series of plays, all of which will be shot on film and on location. PFH is committed to employing crews half of whose members are drawn from London Weekend's full-time staff; but Trodd, thankful for having escaped a video quota, does not regard this as a handicap to independence. Weaning crews from a comfortable (and often enervating) reliance on studio-bound company product and trying to draw them into an allegiance, however tentative, to a single production, or series, is

he believes a valuable and artistically invigorating experience.

Although LWT has put up most of the finance (a small amount of topping-up money has come from German and American television), the company's insistence on taking part in artistic decisions has been minimal. It was Trodd who approached Ken Campbell, for instance, and persuaded this decidedly maverick artist that he both write and direct for television. If the project comes off, it should prove a novel and probably a notable TV debut. Despite his desire to push out the frontiers of television drama, Trodd regards the ten plays as basically television ventures. This despite the fact that had Joseph Losey, as was hoped, been signed to direct *Blade on the Feather*—the title comes from the Eton Boating Song; and the protagonist, a donnish ex-Secret Serviceman, bears a resemblance to Anthony Blunt (though he was created before the latter's exposure)—it would have been made for theatrical distribution.

Meanwhile, California beckons. Potter is, according to Trodd, slightly flattered to find himself a seemingly bankable

writer. MGM have signed with PFH to produce a version of *Pennies from Heaven*. Harold Ross will direct, and Potter will relocate the action in Chicago. Much, however, still rides on the success of the company's initial television package; and this in turn rests largely on Potter's proven worth as a television writer. The nuances of class, the acid, highly personal view of the human predicament, the tug of the past (of youth and family, as well as of a pre-war frame of references) are all present—and powerfully so, judging from the script and several hours of rushes—in *Cream in My Coffee*.

Potter's virtues remain decidedly post-imperial: in a way almost consciously anti-Hollywood, though he certainly does not spurn his immense television audience (seeming rather to have exactly gauged the material the medium can best accommodate). His effects are marshalled with schoolmasterly exactitude: 'Please, *no* raining and *not* black umbrellas,' an authorial direction reads in the shooting-script, prefacing a brief scene in a cemetery. At another moment, tipping his cap to the master of control, he notes that a motif—the rapping of a blind toggle on a window-pane—should be 'oddly ominous and, so to speak, *Hitchcockian*' (Potter's own half-ironic emphasis).

*Cream in My Coffee* again taps a vein close to Potter's heart, the popular songs of the pre-war years. The production assembled a 16-piece band—slightly larger, Trodd notes, than was strictly called for—and Potter's instructions to the musicians are characteristically to the point. 'A teatime trio, on an oval platform, are scraping sweetly through "The Isle of Capri".' Ideally, a straight mime to the voice of the late Sam Browne. If, as likely, this not possible, as good an imitation as possible.' In fact, the voice of Sam Browne was not available, and a session-singer is heard while the actor Martin Shaw, as Jack Butcher, the hotel's brilliant resident vocalist, mimes to the velvety lyrics. In Bernard's absence, Butcher casts a sharp eye on the distraught Jean . . . But to reveal the deceptively symmetrical plot is probably to spoil future pleasures.

JOHN PYM



# RICHARD ROUD

The most exciting and rewarding film festivals are those in which one discovers new directors. The 33rd Cannes Film Festival, however, offered the next best thing: three films by known directors which either surpassed their previous work or showed that they were capable of something different, something new. And for the first time in years, the Festival was dominated by French directors: Maurice Pialat (*Loulou*), Alain Resnais (*Mon Oncle d'Amérique*) and Jean-Luc Godard (*Sauve qui peut/La Vie*; provisional English title *Slow Motion*, although I think that *Stop Motion* would be both more accurate and more inviting).

● Maurice Pialat is the most shadowy major figure in French cinema. Although he is well over fifty, he has made only five feature films. The fact that *Loulou* was shown on the penultimate day of the

Festival, when many people had left and those who remained were fagged out, meant that it did not receive its proper due. And yet in its unambitious way, it was as remarkable a film as any shown. The title has nothing to do with Alban Berg's opera, Pabst's film or the Wedekind play on which both are based. Loulou is the nickname for Louis (Gérard Depardieu), a happily unemployed leather-jacketed proletarian of precisely the kind that Depardieu has often played: the super-stud. Nelly (Isabelle Huppert) is married to André (Guy Marchand), an advertising man. They work together, and seem to have a reasonably happy marriage. But Nelly's chance encounter with Loulou reveals possibilities of sexual fulfilment which she has never dreamed of with André. And so, in spite of the fact that she has to support him, in spite of their differences in education, class and interests, she leaves her husband for Loulou.

A banal story, if ever there was one, but the film is Pialat's finest work because, like Renoir, he is able to make us sympathise with all three characters. He does this first through his superb direction of actors: Depardieu, for whom this kind of role is a snip, nevertheless manages to give Loulou something more,

and Huppert, cross-cast, is extraordinary as the young woman who, Phèdre-like, is completely subjugated by sexual desire. Guy Marchand is less well known, but his performance as the deserted husband is both grotesque and moving. These three characters, however, do not exist in a void. Pialat is the poet of the *petite-bourgeoisie* and of the working class (his origins may have something to do with this—his father lost all his money when Pialat was young and the family moved uneasily between the two classes). And the long Sunday lunch sequence in the country with Loulou's family and friends tells us more about French life than we usually see in the cinema. Pialat does not glamorise his characters: he shows us their faults and still makes us love them as much as, presumably, he does. Pialat is not a neo-realist, nor a poetic realist. The director whose work his most resembles is Jean Grémillon, that almost forgotten master of the 30s and 40s.

● *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* should have won the Grand Prix—or at least have shared it with Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (ancestor worship oblige). Instead Resnais was fobbed off with the Grand Special Jury Prize, which the Jury declared was—this year—the equivalent of the Grand Prix: a case of bad faith if

# CANNES

## JAN DAWSON

Despite a handful of daunting masterpieces, Cannes 1980 generated sadly little sense of a new generation of film-makers straining against the economic odds to haul their art into uncharted territories. Retrenchment was, perhaps, the key word, with the Festival dominated by established directors, consolidating and undermining their reputations in roughly equal measure. The brief of reporting on anything *not* in competition, anticipated as a chance for some exuberant crystal-gazing, thus risks sounding in execution a shade like Cassandra's last communiqué from the Trojan front.

● But first the very good news—Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Stalker*—even if it does represent one of the cinema's most searingly pessimistic visions. An opening, philosophically speculative title provides a cursory exposition: since the fall of what was perhaps a meteorite, inexplicable mutations in both a landscape and its nearby inhabitants have caused the devastated area to be declared a no-man's-land, its borders sealed and zealously patrolled. The area acts like a magnet on the title character who, in murky black and white sequences suggestive of ill-preserved archive material, sets out from his family's hovel to guide a writer (philosophical) and a professor (scientific) on his own third expedition through the forbidden zone. With the trio's dash across the border (a chase sequence in which the terror is palpable but the pursuers largely invisible, and the menace is provided as much by a goods-train laden with luminous scientific equipment as by an occasional

trigger-happy patrolman), white gradually predominates over black. And with their arrival in the zone itself—at first glance a post-apocalyptic waste-land offering only inaccessibly distant romantic vistas—the images imperceptibly turn, first to the palest of pastel tones, then to a stronger, much muted colour.

The sudden, magical metamorphoses of the terrain—fields undulating beneath the characters' feet, ruined dwellings turning to waterfalls—apparently justify the stalker's faith in its awesome mysteries. Yet his charges' successful defiance of his belief in the terrain's superstitious laws, their denunciations of it as a breeding-ground for discontent and impossible aspirations, their demonstrations that it is no more habitable than the intolerable place he has left, also hit their mark. The only cold comfort to be drawn from a film which may equally be read as a narrowly political or broadly philosophical allegory, or merely as a grim new style of science-fiction, is that the



ever I saw one. As with *Loulou*, the film's title calls for some explanation. The American uncle is a proverbial figure in French life, and refers to the uncle who went off to America many years ago, who has not been heard from since, but whose death or return to the homeland—rich—will solve all the family's problems.

The symbolic meaning in the film is that Resnais (and his versatile scriptwriter Jean Gruault, as well as Professor Henri Laborit, whose biological theories inspired the film) deplores the fact that most people assume they have a right to happiness—just as they might expect to inherit a lot of money or have their problems solved by the American uncle. But there are no American uncles, and we have no right to expect happiness. And, in fact, none of the three major characters achieves it. René (Gérard Depardieu), the peasant from the Vendée who leaves the farm for the textile industry, is a victim of the multi-national conglomerate which treats human beings as elements either to be disposed of when they cease to be useful or 'laterally displaced' in the interests of efficiency, no matter what the cost may be to the individual. Janine (Nicole Garcia) comes from a working-class family; brought up to chalk 'US Go Home' on the walls of

Paris, she breaks with her family to go on the stage. She has something of a success in the fringe theatre, but her sentimental life is ruined by a meeting with Jean (Roger Pierre). He leaves his wife to live with her, but when the wife comes to Janine to tell her she is dying of cancer, Janine nobly sends Jean back to his wife, without telling him why. Years later, she discovers that the wife is both alive and well. Janine thinks that if she reveals this great lie to Jean, he will come back to her. But she is wrong. Time has done its work, and Janine is left alone. Professionally, however, she has done well. After leaving the stage, she has become a stylist in ready-to-wear clothing, and it is thus that she eventually meets René, whom she tries to help out of his job dilemma. She succeeds, temporarily, but René's future is more than doubtful. Jean, who had great ambitions, seems to have succeeded in fulfilling them, and yet his success is at least as depressing as René's failure.

So much for the bare bones of the plot. But, as always, plot is only one element of a Resnais film. Mixing fiction with documentary, he has a fourth important character: Dr Laborit himself, who appears from time to time to explain his theories. The film is in no way an illus-

tration of those theories, but there is of course an important connection between them and the story. Sartre maintained, in *Huis Clos*, that hell is other people. Laborit maintains that we are other people, or rather that we are what other people have made of us. His studies of laboratory animals have led him to conclude that in the face of danger or dilemma, there are three possible reactions: flight, struggle, or inhibition. The last is, alas, the most common, and it leads first to inaction, then to anguish and fear, and finally to illness. René suffers from stomach ulcers, Jean from kidney stones. Only Janine—who, as we have seen, has faced her problems squarely and done her best to overcome them—is relatively healthy.

'We are what other people have made of us.' Yes, and Resnais also shows that our behaviour can be influenced not only by real people but also by fictional ones. Each of his three main characters identifies with a movie star. René, who is incapable of letting out his aggression, has Jean Gabin as his role-model. And when we see René frustrated and silent, we get a flash (black and white and mute) of Gabin growing into one of his towering rages. Janine identifies with Jean Marais—not so much the Marais of the

# NIES

imaginatively resourceful Tarkovsky—having demonstrated both the impossibility of sustaining faith or imagination and the impossibility of continuing without them—has his protagonist return, irrevocably, to the forbidden zone.

● Depressing in a doubly different sense was *Lightning over Water*, subtitled *Nick's Film*, for which Nicholas Ray posthumously shares a co-director credit with Wim Wenders. The original idea was that the two would make a film about one another in what were to prove the last four weeks of Ray's life—even in the planning stages, an uneasy mixture of art, therapy and *vérité* documentary resolved to show its own every artifice. Many of the early scenes are a remarkable, if wilfully unanalytic tribute to Ray's determination to expire with courage and humour: with zestful showmanship, he smokes through bouts of cancerous coughing and submits to endless retakes. The concept requires, however, that equal attention be given to

Ray's generally sycophantic entourage and, primarily, to Wenders himself. The latter's evident dislocation, the creative impasse he admits having reached on *Hammett*, even his ethical reservations about the project on which we see him engaged, all glibly parallel Ray's literal (and ultimately unsuccessful) struggle to retain control, and inevitably turn Wenders' own soul-baring into unintended narcissism. Whoever conceived the sequence, it is hard to react with more than numbed disbelief to the sight of Wenders lying in a surgical gown on Ray's hospital bed. In a final admission of uncertainty, Wenders abandoned the film's footage to his editor Peter Przygodda. Cut together without commentary or explanation, it remains a captainless vessel, lacking the emotive power of the recurring image of the junk aboard which Ray dreamed of sailing to China to discover a cure, and which we see circling New York harbour with loose ends of film flapping like flags from its deck.

● Where the ultimately authorless *Lightning over Water* was an exercise without precedents, Fellini's *City of Women* offered only a grotesque parody of the director's familiar (and never ungrotesque) sexual nightmares: a repellent circus of infantile-regressive fantasies the more anachronistic for his attempts to hitch them to a certain surface modishness. Fellini's oft-expressed desire to return to the womb (and equally oft-expressed fear of doing so) has been intensified by a fresh anxiety that the entrance may now be barred for political as well as anatomical reasons. *The City of Women* stars Marcello Mastroianni, again playing an over-the-hill womaniser, trapped this time in a feminist convention whose delegates combine the come-on appeal and cosmetic consumption of a strippers' carnival with the castrating zeal of Amazon harpies. And the hero's brief escape from this monstrous regiment to an ageing Don Juan's inconclusive orgy merely serves to shift the film



# CANNES

## RICHARD ROUD

Cocteau films but rather the Marais who acted in countless adventure films. Like him, she sees herself as the dauntless hero who is able to solve every problem, to rescue the unfortunate, succour the helpless. Only once do we get a flash of Marais in anything but a heroic role, and that is when we see him tumbling down the staircase at the end of Cocteau's *The Eagle Has Two Heads*. Most mysteriously, Jean identifies (if that is the right word) with Danielle Darrieux, the first woman he fell in love with (from a seat in the stalls, of course). This use of film clips may sound like a gimmick, but it works. If nobody had ever learned to read, nobody would ever have fallen in love, said La Bruyère. And consciously or unconsciously our generation has been influenced by the style of the movie stars with whom we grew up.

As for Resnais' style, this is his least flashy film. He has sacrificed his intoxicating tracking shots and breathtaking editing effects. The film is very 'straight',

which does not, however, mean that it is simple. In the polyphonic beginning, the childhoods of the three main characters are intricately interwoven. Animals are used to counterpoint the characters. And in the tour de force of the second part, we see the same scenes of childhood, but shot and perceived differently. Now, because of the new camera angles and because we know what became of the children, these childhoods take on a different meaning. But I must stop: the film is such that one could (and should) go on for pages. It is bound to open in Britain soon.

● If Resnais' film is a masterpiece, the greatness of the Godard was doubted by many. I myself had to see it twice: the first time to discover that everything we had been told about it (and that includes Godard's own statements) was not true. It is not a return to his 60s films, it is not a classically constructed or perfectly organised work. And it was only after I discovered what the film was *not* that I was able to appreciate it for what it *was*. It's a pity that the title of Godard's first feature was mistranslated as 'Breathless' when 'A Bout de Souffle' means literally 'At one's last gasp' or, more colloquially, 'At the end of one's rope'. And *Sauve qui*

*peut*, 'Every man for himself', is the film of a man at the end of his tether, and a perfect reflection of the times in which we live: chaotic, pessimistic, fragmentary. The world today seems bent on going to hell in a handcart and Godard, the great barometer, has portrayed that in his film.

As in the Resnais film, there are three characters whose lives become intertwined. Isabelle Rivière (Isabelle Huppert) is the country girl turned prostitute (and the film even includes a parody of the murder of Anna Karina in *Vivre sa Vie*). There is also Denise Rimbaud (Nathalie Baye), who decides to leave her boy friend and her work to seek the simple life in the country, and there is Paul Godard (Jacques Dutronc) who has left his wife and daughter for Denise and who is in turn left by her. Resnais and Gruault buried the four-act structure of their scenario; Godard labels his four sections as imaginary (Denise Rimbaud's flight to the country), fear (Paul Godard's fear of all human relationships, even his relationship with his own body), commerce (Isabelle Rivière, who sells her body as Paul sells his brains), and finally music (in which all the themes of the film are first tied together and then unknotted).

RESNAIS: Mon Oncle d'Amérique.

PIALAT: Loulou.

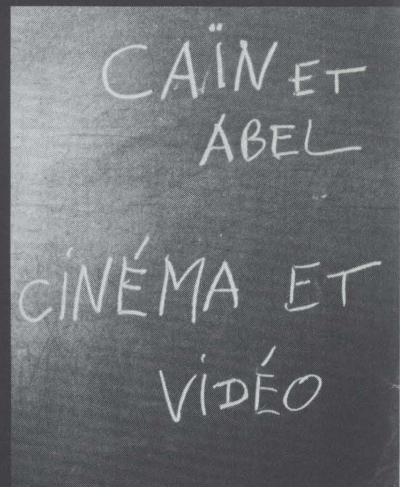
GODARD: Sauve qui peut/La Vie



Nicole Garcia.



Isabelle Huppert, Gérard Depardieu.



Jacques Dutronc.

# CANNES

## JAN DAWSON

from the misogynistic to the plain misanthropic.

● Regrettably, Cannes' best Italian film, by Giuseppe Bertolucci, not only also caused distress in feminist circles but, being produced by elder brother Bernardo and open to obvious thematic comparisons with *Last Tango* (which Giuseppe co-scripted), caused many critics to dismiss it as a work of derivative rather than affinitive talent. Like *Last Tango*, *Oggetti Smarriti* (An Italian Woman) involves the stripping away of the rituals and compromised moral posturings which enable an Italian bourgeoisie to retain the illusion of a controlled and purposeful identity. Rather than unequivocally sexual, the assault this time is inscrutably existen-

tial. It is led—like a game of 'dare' in which there is no limit to the forfeits—by a manically dispossessed gentleman (Bruno Ganz) from his temporary home inside Milan station, where heroine Mariangela Melato impulsively misses her train in an attempt to avoid the untenable demands of a petulant husband and an enflamed lover. Ganz's omniscient catechising is only partly explained by lyrical flashbacks revealing that he and the woman once shared forbidden childhood games and vows; similarly, his liberating demolition of her fragile composure is only partly attributable to his initiation of her into the nether world of the station's junkies and big-bosomed cloakroom attendants. Balancing memory, temptation and taboo, the games he plays with her—including even his conspiratorial suicide—are an unsettling mixture of theatrical ritual and twinkling humour. They acquire a haunting resonance from the fact that, in Milan's railway Gothic and neon causeways,

which he observes with both a documentarist's and a poetic Freudian's eye, Giuseppe Bertolucci has found a correlative, as integral as *Marienbad*'s baroque, for his heroine's labyrinthine psychological inferno.

● Another assault on bourgeois contradictions (appealing only to a minority, to which I subscribed) came from West Germany's Robert van Ackeren, a one-time cameraman whose recent avant-garde works have often consisted of *tableaux* barely *vivants*. In *Purity of Heart*, he undertakes a still stylised but somewhat more animated probing of fashionable poses, caricaturing pseudo-liberal attitudes and repressions with a Grand Guignol relish. When the female half of a cooingly happy couple—post-'68 and definitely less radical than chic—is insidiously pressured by her 'tolerant' mate into taking a lover, the revelation that she possesses a sexuality beyond either their control or civilised understanding swiftly shatters the plexiglass



Indeed, music is more important here than in any of Godard's previous work. The credits read: a film 'composed' (not directed) by Jean-Luc Godard. Each section bears a musical notation (Largo, Allegro, etc.) and there is an original score by one Gabriel Yared. But the film, which is extremely beautiful, also uses video techniques, and it makes extraordinary use of stop-motion photography. A homage to Marey and Muybridge, of course, but also the decomposition of movement allows a kind of analysis of action (in both senses). I haven't space to discuss the performances in any of the three French films (although the Godard is a Swiss-French co-production), but I must say that Isabelle Huppert (in the Piat and the Godard films) and Gérard Depardieu (in the Resnais and the Piat) give such substantial and such different performances that any sensible person would have given them the acting awards. Alas, the Cannes jury this year seems to have been made up of unsensible people.

● The two other major films in competition were Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* and Krzysztof Zanussi's *Constans*. *Kagemusha* is tricky to write about, because the version we saw will never be seen again

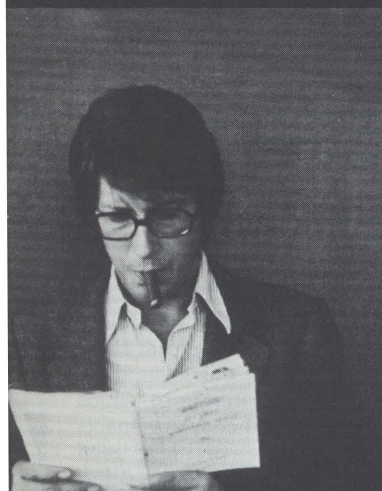
outside Japan. The film was finished only just in time for Cannes, and Kurosawa was not able to take out the twenty minutes or so he had intended to cut for the Occident. Nor did he have time to change the *Star Wars* style of music that young Japanese audiences seem to crave. For once, the idea of cuts seems sensible, because as the film stands a fascinating idea is buried in too many battle sequences during which one is never sure who is winning. The idea, almost a Pirandellian concept, is that a poor thief is chosen for his resemblance to the dying leader of the Takeda clan to take the latter's place for three years, since it is essential to the clan's fortunes that the leader should seem still to be alive. At first the thief is frightened; then, gradually, he becomes the man he is impersonating. He fools the Imperial concubines; he fools his own grandson; but he does not fool his horse, and eventually this brings about his downfall. The battle scenes are indeed beautiful, but one could do with fewer of them—and this is the area in which Kurosawa plans cuts. He may also add an explanatory title or two, because the first shot (seven minutes by my watch) shows us the dying leader of the clan, his brother and the thief, all

in one shot and all played by the same actor.

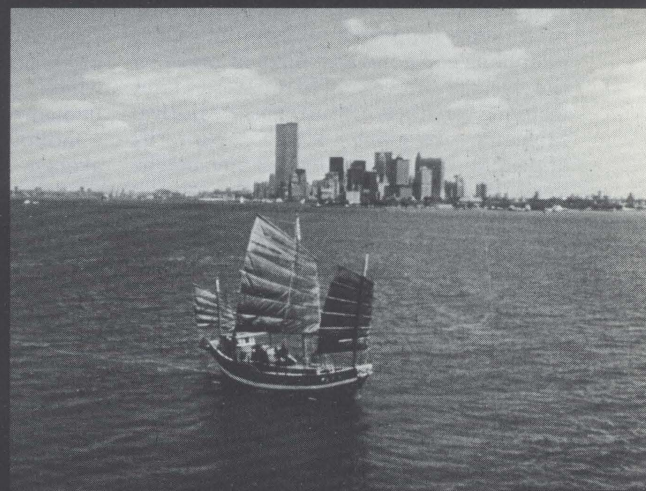
● In Polish the same word is used for constancy and for the mathematical notion of a constant, so it is hard to know which translation of *Constans* to plump for. Zanussi's film boldly continues the current Polish theme of strong criticism of the seemingly endemic corruption and dishonesty in society. Doctors are shown as bribable; only those Poles who have hard currency can go to the chemist shops that stock the latest and best drugs from Europe and America. Zanussi's idealistic hero, luminously played by a new young actor, Tadeusz Bradecki, is a frustrated mountain climber. He longs for the Himalayas, but because he refuses to knuckle under to the system he has to become a skyscraper window-cleaner. In the final scene, he is working on scaffolding renovating an old house when a small boy wanders into the area and is presumably killed by a falling stone. Witold has always seen his life as a gamble with destiny, but this accident can be interpreted as Zanussi's demonstration that, however organised the economy and the state, chance can play a key role. Zanussi himself now looks the most important of the younger East European directors.

VAN ACKEREN: Purity of Heart.

WENDERS/RAY: Lightning over Water.



Matthias Habich, Elisabeth Trissenaar.



surface of their model lives. With no language for expressing 'uncivilised' emotional needs (his desperate possessiveness, her demonic lust for the uncouth stud she intellectually despises), the pair can only assault one another's possessions. A succession of vindictive acts builds to a retaliatory smashing of the consumer treasures that have emblemised their union, before a surprise, horror-film killing restores a semblance of normality. Despite the participation of several Fassbinder collaborators (Dietrich Lohmann, camera; Peer Raben, music; Elisabeth Trissenaar as the tormented lady), the film is more than a one-dimensional shadow of the master's work. Eschewing both humanist resonances and overt political references, its melodramatic posturing achieves an effectively disconcerting mix of grand opera and broad farce.

● Ulrike Ottinger is another German director whose assurance has grown with her budget. With none of the overt fem-

inism of *Madam X*, her *Ticket of No Return* follows an inscrutable, couture-clad beauty through the terminal consummation of her monomaniac passion for alcohol. Taking her itinerary from Berlin's official tourist guide, Ottinger—her own camerawoman—casts the city in an unworldly, dreamlike glow by shooting mostly at dawn and twilight. Rejecting realism, her stylised tableaux are, for the film's first half, accompanied by a literate and blisteringly witty commentary. And though I personally regret Ottinger's decision to move her work towards a surreal, ritualised pantomime, one might be tempted, in any year but 1980, to compare the skill with which she does so to that of Fellini.

● Meanwhile, for those who prefer their images of Germany to refer more obviously to the state of the nation, a four-man collective, including Alexander Kluge and Volker Schlöndorff, has created in *The Candidate* (along with much else) a collage portrait of Franz-

Josef Strauss and of the society which will decide in October whether to adopt this gargantuan survivor of many, numbingly well-documented scandals as its next 'strong leader'. One of the film's starting points is the observation that real political decision-making is an invisible process; so, too, are the atavistic attitudes and subjective dreams which ultimately determine how and why most people vote. Through its elliptical methods and disconcerting juxtapositions (alpine scenery, romantic moonscapes, beer-swilling party conventions), the film advances beyond a daunting silhouette of 'Germany in Autumn, 1980' to a somewhat despairing demonstration of the impossibility of reconciling within any structure the contradictory claims of memory, aspirations, economic greed and democratic dreams. To which Utopian task, through their study of a chillingly un-Utopian reality (which loses none of its immediacy as agit-prop), Kluge and his associates tirelessly return. ■



# REPORTING

'Fortunately there are more and more of us convinced that there doesn't exist (and has never existed) cinema in Spain.' Thus Carlos and David Pérez Merinero in their prologue to an anthology of cinema texts culled from *La Gaceta Literaria*, the magazine which ran from 1927 to 1933 and whose contributors included Dali, Alberti, Alvarez del Vayo, Baroja, Marañon and Buñuel.

It is true that there has never been a cinema industry in Spain. Cifesa, founded in 1932 and long since defunct, was the only company run on remotely Hollywood lines. In the silent era films were often made by businessmen ignorant of cinema; they ensured their tight budgets were not exceeded by using casts of the poor and unemployed. (These *bas fonds* are described in *Cinematógrafo*, the fascinating novel by Carranque de Rios published in 1936.) During the Second Republic, while the bulk of films continued to be kitsch (bandits, bull-fighters and gypsies), there were some that betokened awareness of social and political realities; and this tendency continued in the Republic during the Civil War. Franco's victory, however, ushered in a state-supported cinema of white telephone comedies and films in praise of the armed forces. There were later fashions for frock-coat dramas, historical tableaux, religious kitsch. No rift appeared in the studios' papier-mâché until 1951 and Antonio del Amo's *Día tras Día* (Day after Day), the first Spanish film to incorporate the aesthetic if not all the ideology of neo-realism.

Antonio del Amo, born in 1911, aided Juan Piqueras with the running of the Marxist *Nuestro Cinema* (1932-35). During the Civil War he made documentaries for the Communist Party, being for a time attached to the film division of Valentin González, 'El Campesino'. He was also involved in the making of Malraux's *Sierra de Teruel* (*Espoir*). In the 40s, after three years in prison, he was gradually allowed back into the industry, making his first feature in 1947. His best film, *Sierra Maldita*, won a prize at San

Sebastian in 1954. Two years later del Amo made the first of his nine films with 'Joselito', the 'little nightingale'. But neither these nor the films he has made since have been of interest. His career is a symbol of the cultural cauterisation produced by Franco's victory in 1939.

Franco died in 1975. One immediate effect on younger directors was a *recherche du temps perdu*, if not *temps inconnu*: such films as Camino's *Las Largas Vacaciones del 36* (The Long Holidays of '36), begun before Franco's death; Giménez Rico's *Retrato de Familia* (Family Portrait); and Jaime Chavarrí's magnificent gloss on Lorca and his significance, *A Un Dios Desconocido* (To an Unknown God). Other directors have gone other ways, though there is often a common link to the past. Three recent films—*La Sabina*, *Dos* and *La Verdad sobre el caso Savolta*—indicate some of the options which are now open to serious Spanish directors.

*La Sabina* is José Luis Borau's first film since the very successful *Poachers* in 1975. Borau is again producer and director and, for the first time, solely responsible for the script. The film is co-produced by the Swedish Film Institute, which contributed 30 per cent of the budget of 70 million pesetas (nearly half a million pounds), double the cost of an average Spanish film. Given the state of the film industry in Spain, Borau realises the need to make films that will sell abroad.

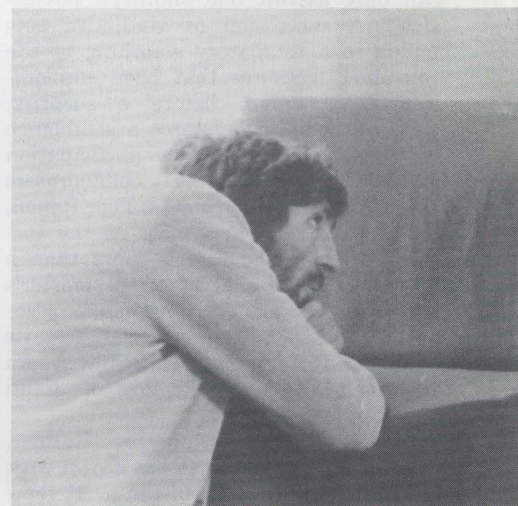
*La Sabina* is set in Andalusia. It is neither the perennial 'typical' Andalusia of Spanish films nor that of the tourist, but the Andalusia of nineteenth century travellers like George Borrow, who saw girls bathing nude in the Guadalquivir, the Andalusia of legends and mystery. This is not to deny the correctness of social nuances in the film's contemporary setting. The photography of Lars-Göran Björne is faithful to the daytime glare and dusk tints—it respects Andalusia and never vulgarises it. One Spanish critic went so far as to claim that never

before had Andalusia been so beautifully filmed. It is also the country of the exile. Borau repeatedly catches facets of the exile's experience: slugs of Terry brandy as consolation for emotional slights; the importance of the welcome from strangers, from barmen, as an antidote to being cocooned in a language that is only imperfectly understood; the attraction of girls with long black hair and huge brown eyes.

Michael (Jon Finch) is an English writer who lives in a village house with the kooky Daisy (Carol Kane). His predatory wife (Harriet Andersson) and his best friend Philip (Simon Ward) track him down: she breaks him with loveless sex when he is drunk, and Philip beats him to Pepa (Angela Molina), a local girl and the incarnation of Mérimée's Carmen or Sternberg's Concha Perez. Michael is yet another Borau character who falls for a woman with whom he has nothing in common. (Compare the relationship between Darren McGavin and Stéphane Audran in *B Must Die*, and between Ovidi Montllor and Alicia Sanchez in *Poachers*.) Presumably Michael would never dream of taking Pepa back to England because she hasn't heard of Virginia Woolf. Over the jockeyings of the characters there broods the legend of the Sabina, a fabulous female in a cave who is supposed to love men to exhaustion before killing them.

Michael purports to be investigating Hyatt, an English writer who visited the area a hundred years previously and fell in love with a local girl. He disappeared mysteriously: suicide or the Sabina? Borau said in an interview: 'I wanted the audience to have the sensation that there was something weighing down on them that they didn't understand, to which they lacked the key.' Michael re-enacts Hyatt's tragedy. Once he has read Hyatt's letters to the girl he must suffer his fate. Borau uses Shakespeare ('Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her') to insinuate the love-hate relationship between Michael and Philip which began at public school and which leads

**ROGER MORTIMORE discusses the latest films by**





# FROM MADRID

inexorably to their death, in the cave of the Sabina.

*La Sabina* is technically different from what Borau calls 'the Fritz Lang style' of *B Must Die* and *Poachers*. 'La Sabina is a very Renoir-type film—the characters had to be rooted in the landscape. Because of this I had to think from the beginning of a less rigid planning, less hard, less picture for picture; the opposite of what my style has been. I wanted the characters to move freely and for the camera to follow them freely, without the need for close-ups. In the whole film there are only two close-ups.' It is a passionate film, with recurring images of desperation. It is not surprising that Angela Molina unearths memories of Celia Montalván as Josefa in Renoir's *Toni*, that masterpiece of passion among exiles. The clash of egos and libidos in *La Sabina* is brought out by the use of Spanish, English, American and Swedish actors; the clash of acting styles is a paradigm of the clash of cultures, something that would not have been possible with an all-Spanish cast.

It is also a resolutely unfashionable film. It is to be hoped that Borau's courage, recklessness even, will pay off at the international box-office. Borau is both creator and producer, a solid talent that eschews compromise and knows, unlike so many producers and directors in Spain, that it is impossible to step twice into the same river.

There could hardly be more of a contrast between *La Sabina* and *Dos*, written and directed by Alvaro del Amo. His first full-length film after six shorts, *Dos* was shot in black and white in five days after a month of rehearsals. The action is confined to a few rooms in an austere elegant house. The only characters are a young man and a young woman, Luis and Julia. They talk about a myriad of subjects as well as declaring their love, rejecting one another and mentioning other characters, including a father and mother who acquire a crepuscular presence. Luis and Julia are at the same time

two children (friends, cousins, brother and sister), two lovers, husband and wife, two parents: a couple.

*Dos* is tightly structured. The pauses between the early scenes are signalled by held shots of the rooms bereft of the couple, accompanied by music for two instruments or voice and piano or piano for four hands. These scenes lead up to the central one, the watershed, which takes place in a children's bedroom. Scenes then lead back, in the form of an ellipse, to the end. In this second part the scenes are separated by held shots of objects to which the couple frequently refer, dolls and china dogs, again accompanied by music. The leitmotiv of a dance between scenes gives the film the structure of a rondo. Luis and Julia talk as they dance; but what they say is revealed gradually each time the dance comes round.

*Dos* has the stare of a basilisk. (Del Amo talks of 'the general atmosphere of desolation'.) Yet, as in Beckett, the effect is heartening, partly because Luis and Julia do not seem bothered by their *huis clos*. Although he is the author of the standard work on Spanish film comedy of the 60s, Alvaro del Amo is not a film buff. He acknowledges the influence of Pinter, whom he has translated—he has also translated Jellicoe, Gombrowicz, Arden, Stoppard, Adamov and Ionesco. *Dos* was written as a play, with the action confined to one room. It has been opened out for the film, and new scenes have been added.

The film is something new aesthetically, at least in Spain. In its very different way, it is as innovative as Godard's *Numéro Deux*. The actors, whose interpretations are miracles of subdued penetration, found it difficult at the start of rehearsals because of the lack of interpretative pegs. Undoubtedly one of the most uncommercial films made in Spain, *Dos* is also one of the most striking. It has an austere, frozen beauty (del Amo calls it 'a sad and petrified beauty'), its formal perfection the result of del Amo's unobtrusive direction and the

piercing photography of Angel Luis Fernández.

*Dos* was made by a group of friends on an infinitesimal budget. The actors weren't paid. Del Amo says they want to do another film with him under similar conditions, living meanwhile off their earnings from commercial work (Isabel Mestres was Salome in the Zeffirelli/Burgess *Jesus of Nazareth* and has worked with Monte Hellman; Joaquín Hinojosa was in *Pascal Duarte, Elisa, vida mía* and *Camada negra*). It is to be hoped that producer Augusto Martínez Torres, himself a director, will not be forced to become a cinema proprietor to show *Dos*, as Mamerto López Tapia had to do to get Alfonso Ungria's *El hombre oculto* a screening.

The career of Antonio Drove may be regarded as typical of Spanish directors around forty. At film school his teachers included Borau and Antonio del Amo. A script he wrote while a student became *B Must Die*. Of the films he made at the school, *Historia del suicida y la monjita* (Tale of the Suicide and the Nun), a homage to the silent cinema with music and voice off, was shown at Sitges, in film clubs and at the International Festival of Film Schools. The last time it was shown, in Oviedo, Drove was arrested by the political police and held for a few days. The film remained in police headquarters in Madrid and has probably been destroyed; meanwhile the negative 'vanished' from the laboratory. *La Caza de las brujas* (The Witchhunt) is regarded by one critic as 'possibly the grimmest document on moral repression ever filmed in Spain.' The film school not only banned it but confiscated it. This film introduced what has been a constant in Drove's personal work, as opposed to his commercial ventures. It is summed up in a phrase of Brecht's: 'More important than pointing out how wrong it is to commit injustices is to point out how wrong it is to put up with injustices.'

Drove's first professional short film, *¿Que se puede hacer con una chica?*

## José Luis Borau, Alvaro del Amo and Antonio Drove



Left to right: 'La Sabina': Simon Ward and Harriet Andersson; 'Dos': Joaquín Hinojosa, Isabel Mestres; 'La Verdad sobre el Caso Savolta': Antonio Drove with Charles Denner and José Luis Lopez.



(What Can You Do with a Girl?, 1969), won prizes and was put on in Madrid with *Ivan the Terrible*. During the 70s, Drove worked sporadically for television, almost always with problems. In 1974 he made his first feature of three for the producer Dibildos, apostle then of *la tercera vía* ('the third way')—films that were neither vulgar comedies nor hermetic dramas like those of Carlos Saura. In none of these films did Drove have much say in the script. The first, *Tocata y fuga de Lolita*, starred Amparo Muñoz, who became 'Miss Universe' between the making of the film and its release. The fact that she doffed her bra and Franco not yet dead ensured the film considerable commercial success.

Two remarkable television films followed. *La gran batalla de Andalucía* is set during the Peninsular War (which the Spanish insist on calling 'the War of Independence') and tells the story of an obscure but talented painter, a village potter, who refuses to do the portrait of the general in charge of the French occupying forces. When the general has the painter taken out to be shot, the village rises against the invaders. Drove observes the dichotomy: the artist refuses to paint so as not to be used, despite the fact that this will provoke his ruin as an artist anxious to communicate. But Drove's point is that the personal defeat leads to a collective solution, the individual solution being ruled out. A second television film, *El Destino de Antonio Navajo*, had its soundtrack substituted for another by a Spanish television still anxious, as the film censors then were, to give evidence of 'creativity'. Drove withdrew his name from the credits. *La Verdad sobre el caso Savolta* (The Truth about the Savolta Affair), a co-production with France and Italy, is thus the first film for which he feels wholly responsible.

*La Verdad sobre el caso Savolta* is set in Barcelona between 1917 and 1923. Savolta is the owner of an arms factory which supplies the Allies and, illegally, the Germans. Refractory workmen are dismissed or beaten up, methods which come to seem out of date: the paternalist bosses are superseded by, in Drove's words, 'the new executives with a mask of liberalism that hid the nascent fascism.' The advocate of these new methods is Lepprince (Charles Denner), a character clearly based on Baron de Koenig. De Koenig was a German spy in France who later, in Barcelona, supervised a gang of *pistoleros* whose intention was to provoke the working class to retaliation so that the government would be forced to suspend the constitutional guarantees, thus enabling the factory owners to organise a lock-out.

The rise of the *pistoleros* in Barcelona, and the assassinations which reached their peak on 21 January 1921 when autopsies were performed on the bodies of 37 workmen, ushered in the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera in September 1923. (Useful background reading to *Savolta* is Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth*. Brenan gives the figure for political assassinations in Catalonia between January 1919 and December 1923 as being over 700. In 1921 the Prime Minister, Dato, was assassinated in

Madrid. He was the third Spanish Prime Minister to be assassinated in revenge for police brutality in not much more than twenty years.) The film ends, in Drove's words, with 'the great defeat of the workers' movement, with the *resistible* rise of the bosses' gunmen, with fascism and the dictatorship.' *Savolta* is an attempt to recount this nightmare, 'our own nightmare' as Drove calls it. The film brings to light the mechanism of Spanish history since the French Revolution, what José Antonio, the dictator's son and founder of the Falange, called 'the dialectic of fists and pistols.' Or, in Brecht's words, 'Only violence helps where violence rules.'

Drove explains: 'I refuse to accept the



'El Crimen de Cuenca': one of the accused is taken in chains to the grave.

idea of praising the "villains" as irresistible so as to quieten our conscience. That's why I've refused to have a happy ending with the "villain" being killed. First, because historically things were not like that; secondly, because I didn't want an individual solution; and thirdly, because it would have left everyone free of worry. I wanted to unveil this very dangerous disguise of fascism (it still hadn't been codified then) so as to help us recognise its new disguise now. It's a question of showing that fascists are also human beings but, equally, that human beings can be fascists. I've tried to treat the "villains" with respect, bearing in mind that there aren't big political criminals, only the perpetrators of big political crimes. They won then, but they don't always have to win; they will go on doing so if we don't know how to recognise them, to fight against them, which we can only do if we give up the self-satisfied justification of martyrdom.' The point is that *Savolta* is not Manichean in the manner of Costa-Gavras.

The crucial scene in *Savolta* is a fancy dress ball given by Savolta. Dressed as Julius Caesar, he is assassinated during the ball, not long after he has heard by

telephone of the murder of a group of his workers. His murder is also the work of Lepprince. Still dressed as Harlequin, Lepprince tells the police that Savolta's death is 'a declaration of war'. Pujol and other bankers arrive to commiserate before calling on the civil governor to urge him to take stronger measures against the workers. This scene is the nub of the film because it is the centre of the web of duplicity, personified by Lepprince.

Drove has been fortunate to count on the talents of Omero Antonutti, Ettore Manni (sadly, *Savolta* was one of his last films), Charles Denner, Stefania Sandrelli, Alfredo Pea (bearing a resemblance to the young Andres Nin, one-time secretary to Trotsky and leader of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), Ovidi Montllor and José Luis López Vázquez (never better). The photography by Gilberto Azevedo, who has worked with Glauber Rocha, and the music à la Mizoguchi by Egisto Macchi (*Trotsky*, *Padre Padrone*) complement the excellent natural sets.

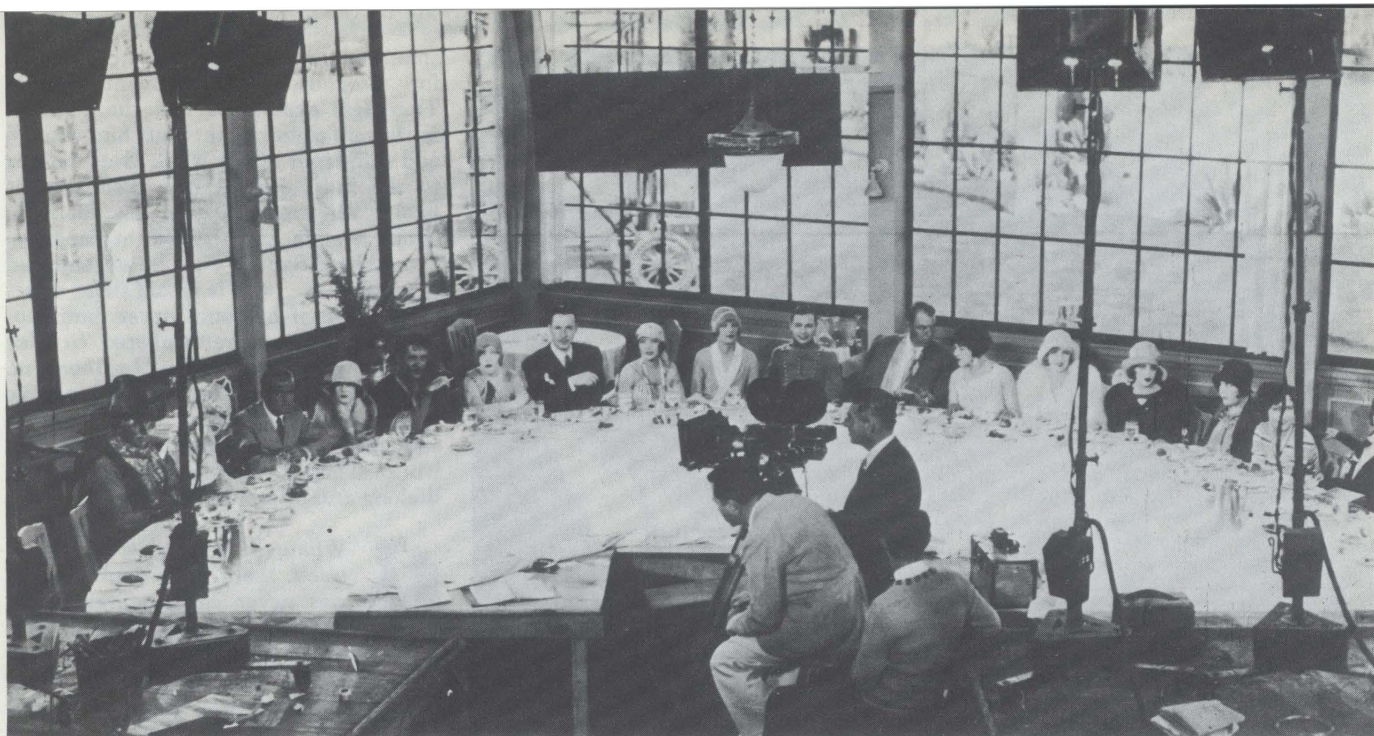
*Savolta* was completed following a four-month strike of technicians after the producer tried to remove Drove as director. The harassment Drove was subjected to in the hope of getting him to step down was a paradigm of the pressures he has articulated in the film. Before returning to Italy, Ettore Manni and Omero Antonutti gave Drove a present. Ironically, given the trouble caused by the producer, it was a book called *Memories of a Fighter* by Enrique Lister, Communist general in the Civil War and now fiercely anti-Eurocommunism.

Censorship no longer exists in Spain, but old habits die hard. Imanol Uribe's *El Proceso de Burgos*, a riveting documentary about the trial of sixteen members of ETA in 1970, was denied the subsidy of 15 per cent of box office takings which is the right of every Spanish film. More serious is the affair of *El Crimen de Cuenca* (1979). The day before it was due to open in sixteen cities, the Ministry of Culture withdrew the film's exhibition licence and took away its 'special quality' prize (worth some £56,000, and also awarded to *La Sabina* and *La Verdad sobre el caso Savolta*, as well as to nine other films). The film is a rigorously accurate account of a true story which happened between 1910 and 1926. Two men were accused of the murder of a third. Under torture by Civil Guards, they confessed, and even indicated the grave which, when opened, was found to contain the body of a woman. In 1913, despite this, they were sentenced to eighteen years in prison. Two years after they were released (in 1924) the man they were supposed to have killed turned up. The case was reopened. A magistrate and a Civil Guard shot themselves, and a priest leapt into a tun of wine.

It is clearly the torture scenes that have upset the Civil Guard, and which led to the film being confiscated by a military court (though a copy went to the Berlin festival legally). The director, Pilar Miró, has been summoned to trial. All this, of course, is in flagrant

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# HOLLYWOOD



If, as a whole and after each instalment, Thames Television's *Hollywood* is inclined to leave a vaguely defined sense of frustration, an awareness of how much has been left out or rushed by, this is the very merit and achievement of the series. The average television documentary traps its bird, cages it, meticulously surveys the bars and out of this conveys a delusive sense of roundness, completeness, omniscience. *Hollywood*, by contrast, recklessly explores the wilds, opens up vistas, glimpses of endless landscapes of the past. On the principle that true wisdom is the knowledge of how much you do not know, *Hollywood* permits you to glimpse, by flashes, a long ago city industry, teeming with activity, prodigally launching its films, six or seven hundred of them every year, year upon year. There is no pretence that thirteen hour-long programmes—or twenty-six or fifty-two—could begin to tell the whole story.

Clear then what could not be done, in the way of precise and detailed chronological survey, through these snatched extracts of films and fragments of old men's memories, the makers have nevertheless succeeded triumphantly in their broader aim, which was to capture and convey the mood, the atmosphere, the excitement, the essence of the era. It is, indeed, the first time since the actual demise of the silent film that so large a public has been brought so close to the actual experience of the silent cinema as our fathers and grandfathers knew it; and has been made to sense the elation of its newness, and the nature of the art that Griffith and other high-falutin people called the Silent Pantomime.

Through the best efforts of the National Film Theatre and the other

BY DAVID ROBINSON

**Thames Television's 'Hollywood': 'the first time . . . so large a public has been brought so close to the actual experience of the silent cinema.'**

Cinémathèques of the world, audiences have seen only a shadowy impersonation of the silent cinema in its heyday—duplicated and faded prints, projected at haphazard speeds and accompanied by the brave *ad hoc* musical accompaniments of a single pianist. From the opening programme *Hollywood* insisted that it was not at all like this, not at least in the Palaces where pictures had their first runs.

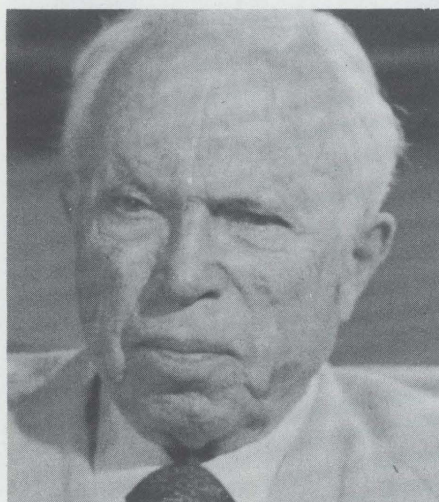
Photographic standards were impeccable. The cameramen had before them

the achievements of Victorian photography; and they allowed no deficiencies of equipment or film stock to deflect them. 'Forty per cent or more of the emotion of silent films,' recalls King Vidor, 'lay in the music.' Even for the average commercial feature film a careful musical score would be provided and performed, in the best theatres at least, by a big orchestra—which is why the coming of sound dealt such a devastating blow to the world of professional musicians.

*Hollywood* aims to reproduce as nearly as possible the original and intended effect of the films. In brief, marvellous moments—fragments of *The Crowd*; the *Ben Hur* chariot race; Langdon sipping his cough mixture; Lloyd suspended over Los Angeles; Garbo; Gish torn by *The Wind*; the demonic Ride of the Klansmen—you glimpse just how potent and magical and strange to our experience the Silent Pantomime could be.

Some of the snappier television critics chided the *Hollywood* people for taking up, yet again, the old whimpers of the Silent People, mourning these fifty years for the passing of their art. But their regret was and is justified. Of course sound gave new dimensions and possibilities and range to the film; but sound was a different medium and, though it killed the other, it could not replace it. It is not just sentimental whimsy to insist that the silent film provided, for the first time in recorded history, a universal language, comprehensible to the whole world and its people, however humble and ill-educated. When sound came this language was thrown away without a further thought; for succeeding generations the silent film has become something archaic, bizarre, primitive.

Kevin Brownlow has been one of a



Top: cast and unit for King Vidor's 'Show People' (1928); Vidor interviewed for 'Hollywood'.





Above: Colleen Moore in 'We Moderns' (1925).  
Below: Henry King filming 'The White Sister' (1924).



small minority struggling, quixotically, for recognition of the silent cinema. Thankless experience and the years of fairly vain pleading have left him with an odd diffidence about it all. Even talking to the most sympathetic friends he is likely, when speaking of his idols, to adopt a style of defensive explanation. '... Alfred Santell ...' he will say, and then add, '... who is an old silent director ...' as if he could never dare suppose that anyone remembered *Orchids and Ermine* or *The Patent Leather Kid*. It must, then, have been something like a dream for Brownlow to find himself suddenly with the resources and good will of Thames Television to further his lifelong and often lonely campaign.



Whatever your view of *Hollywood*, there is no doubt that it was never compromised either in terms of economy or for box-office. Kevin Brownlow admits (and Jeremy Isaacs, who started the whole thing off, and is now credited as 'Special Consultant', confirms) that he entered upon the enterprise with feelings of deep fear and suspicion; but that in time he was astonished to find how often it was the television people demanding greater rigour from him, rather than the reverse.

The genesis of the project was not without its happy accidents. Jeremy Isaacs and Kevin Brownlow had met years before when they were working in neighbouring cutting rooms. Brownlow saw *The World at War* (on someone else's set because he hadn't one himself), was overwhelmed by admiration of the technique, and wrote a fan letter to Isaacs. Coincidentally, two-thirds through *The World at War* series, Isaacs had organised a party for the sake of morale, and had given every member of the unit a present—a copy of Brownlow's *The Parade's Gone By*. It was not entirely accidental. For a couple of years before Brownlow and he even discussed it, he had in his mind that something like this should be his next big project.

In fact it was not Thames' next large-scale documentary series; and this too was fortuitous. After *The World at War*, Isaacs produced *Destination America*. It was advertised prematurely and, everyone associated with it agrees, was rushed out far too fast. It was not a success. The lesson learned—that you need time to do a good job on a series of this sort—was to be of great comfort to *Hollywood*, whose completion and transmission were twice postponed—in all for a year; and then further delayed by the 1979 ITV strike. Though the strike caused some confusion in the well-planned launch campaign, it was itself turned to advantage to permit some finishing touches and additional material.

Jeremy Isaacs first proposed the idea to Kevin Brownlow in 1975. At their first meeting he delivered a homily on the hazards of television as a great cause of stomach ulcers. (As Brownlow left the building he collapsed on the pavement and was instantly sent to hospital with appendicitis.) Isaacs also discouraged Brownlow from any ambitions to undertake the whole project himself, and brought him together with David Gill, as



director. It proved a perfect teaming. Gill, a one-time dancer, in Isaacs' view seemed to discover some physical affinity with the silent films; and his historical knowledge developed with surprising speed. The first weeks were spent, in any case, in daily screenings of silent pictures.

The original idea had been a comprehensive survey of Hollywood history from its origins to the present day; and Brownlow agreed, on sufferance. Twentieth Century-Fox however announced a TV series, *That's Hollywood*, and John Edwards, the first executive producer assigned to the series, decided (to Brownlow's undisguised delight) to limit Thames' project to the silent period.

At this point, early in 1976, however, the possibility that the series would ever actually go ahead seemed remote. *That's Entertainment* had just convinced the Hollywood companies that they possessed great piles of aged golden eggs which they had never noticed before. Now that nostalgia was marketable in a big way, they were not inclined to share their treasure with anyone else. The situation was modified however by the appearance of *That's Entertainment II*, which revealed that compilation films were not, after all, guaranteed winners. MGM eventually yielded, and one by one the other companies followed. Throughout the rest of the production period, Mike Wooller (who had meanwhile become Head of Documentary for Thames and taken over from John Edwards as executive producer of *Hollywood*) was deeply involved in the lengthy and laborious job of teasing out contracts and licences from the film companies.

Not that the companies had in many cases the actual films whose copyrights they so jealously guarded and priced, in cash terms, so expensively. 'We quickly realised that while the big companies had preserved the copyright, few of them had preserved the films. Some had been junked, some destroyed in vault fires, others had decomposed . . . Two-thirds of the entire output of the silent era had disappeared.'

With singular altruism and imagination, at a time when the attitude of the film companies still made it extremely doubtful whether the series could ever be made, Thames sent Brownlow and Gill with a crew to the United States to begin filming interviews. This must be very largely ascribed to Jeremy Isaacs' special regard for the archive value of films, and his recognition that none of their prospective interviewees was immortal: of the first list of possible participants Brownlow had given him at the start, eight had died within a few weeks. (Of the seventy-four people interviewed in the programme, at least eleven are known to have died since.)

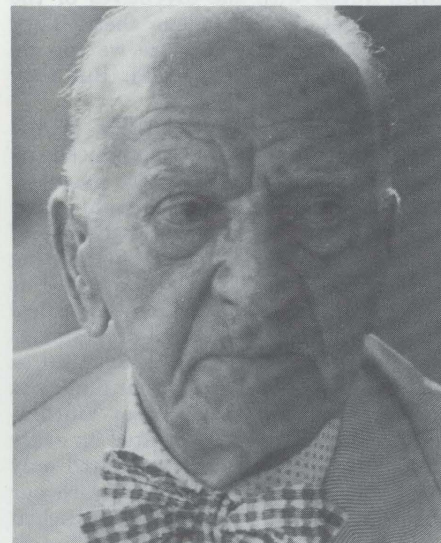
An added persuasion was that an initial specimen interview filmed with Ben Lyon, who happened to be passing through London in 1975, turned out to be irresistibly vivid and funny and lively. 'In what other major American industry,' asks Brownlow, 'could you hope to find people, fifty or sixty years after the peak of their career, still able to talk so brilliantly? The point is, of course, that there has never been another industry

where the leading people arrived at the apex of their careers in their twenties.' Watching the series it is impossible to overcome sheer wonder that people who remember *The Birth of a Nation*, and even a time before it, should still be around, and as sprightly and witty and elegant as these. Some, like Eleanor Boardman, even remain, by any standards, great beauties.

Susan McConachy, an associate producer of the series, went ahead of the main expedition to prepare the ground. 'For *World at War* she had interviewed former Nazis. We reckoned that if she could cope with Himmler's adjutant she could probably deal with Hollywood.'



Colleen Moore, Henry King: lively and mesmerising subjects for the 'Hollywood' interviews.



Miss McConachy's rarest coup was the first (and as it happened the last, since he died shortly afterwards) sound interview with Bryan Foy, a key figure at Warners in the pioneer days of sound.

In the States the first interview to be filmed was with Colleen Moore, who was so enthusiastic about the project that she entertained the crew for a weekend at her Paso Roble ranch, fed them, lent them her swimming pool and sent them all off with souvenirs. Declining the statutory honorarium, she gave them into the bargain one of the liveliest interviews of the whole series. Other veterans were as co-operative, though not all. Some of them haggled over the small honorar-

ium—which nobody pretended had any relation to the real value of their participation—and handled the thing in a strictly business-like way ('You wouldn't have dared ask for a glass of water'). A loyal Hollywood man, 'Lefty' Hough, who had risen from property man to studio head, turned tough on them when he found they were using a British crew; but in the end gave them a spirited account of his days with John Ford.

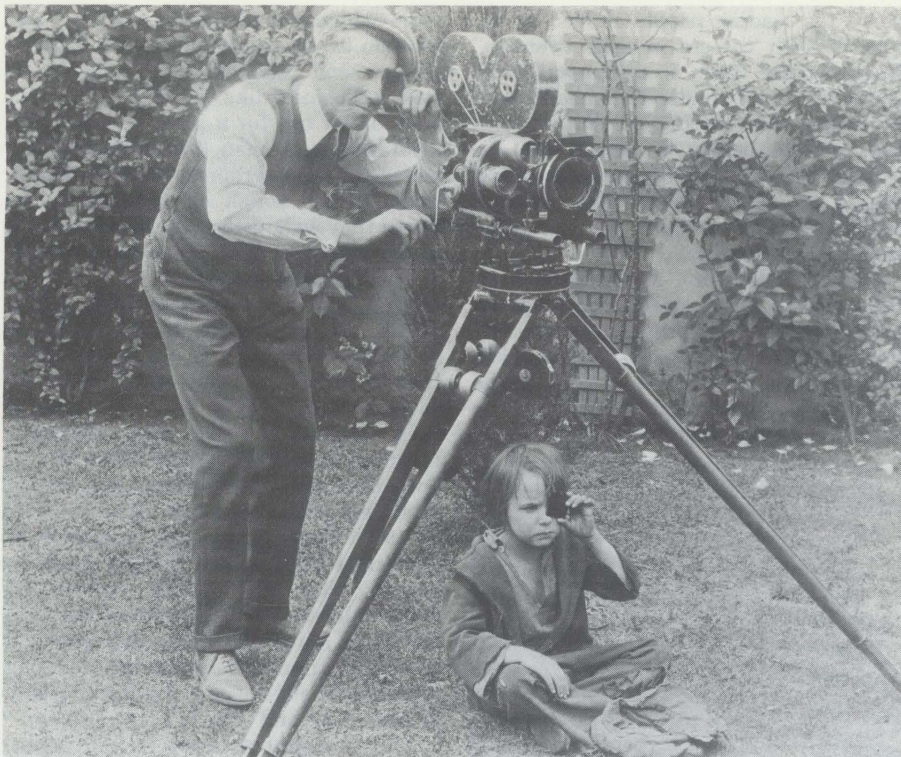
Brownlow and Gill are both quiet, gentle, retiring people, but as stubborn as mules and tough as old boots when they intend to get their way. Few of the veterans were able to stand out against their insistence: the few, however, included Pola Negri, Mary Miles Minter and, of course, Garbo. Then, on a second interview expedition in the summer of 1977, Bessie Love was recruited as Historical Adviser and worked magic in enticing her old friends before the camera. It was she alone who managed to stir Mary Astor out of her sick bed; and the effort appears to have had a lasting therapeutic effect upon the leading lady of *Don Juan* and *The Maltese Falcon*.

The undisputed stars of the series, though, are the great veteran directors. Allan Dwan, now 95, has a quicksilver humour and a memory which can't be faulted, and is still totally recognisable as the youngster who accidentally became a director one day in 1911. With such key figures as himself, Henry King and King Vidor, the unit filmed as much as sixteen reels of film. (The full interviews have been donated to the National Film Archive for permanent record.) Brownlow and Gill admit to disappointment that the screen cannot convey the mesmeric effect upon the film crew of the narrative style of Henry King—who belongs to much the same vintage as Dwan but is elusive about his age in case it prejudices his licence to fly aeroplanes.

They all look strikingly healthy—and had to be, no doubt, to survive the rigours of early-years Hollywood. There were alarms, for all that. The octogenarian Colonel Tim McCoy flew in from Arizona to be filmed, complete with stetson; but complained of feeling ill. Faced with the cameras, the adrenalin flow won out: he gave a cheerful, relaxed interview and Brownlow and Gill were amazed to notice that a badly bloodshot eye cleared miraculously of its own accord. A few hours after the interview, however, he collapsed, clearly seriously ill; and Brownlow had to struggle through his next interview, with Karl Brown, knowing that Gill and Sue McConachy were battling to get the old man into hospital. They succeeded, but the prognosis was pessimistic. Five days later the old Westerner walked out of hospital, to survive above a year after that.

The most elusive quarry turned out to be the great Lillian Gish. Gish always managed to combine with the ethereal quality of her screen presence a keen head for business; it seems that her reluctance was her fear of pre-empting a film that she had made herself, based on her *The Movies*, *Mr Griffith* and *Me* lecture. More and more, however, it became evident that to do the series, and particularly the Griffith segment, without





The infant Jackie Coogan 'helping the cameraman'. Below: Coogan 'reliving the experience' of his work with Chaplin.

Gish was impossible. Brownlow took to telephoning daily to her New York apartment. Eventually David Gill urged Brownlow and Sue McConachy to go to New York and sit on her doorstep; which, precisely, they did. Miss Gish was finally captured, but only after some tough bargaining. No one would say, however, that the price was too high for the eventual contribution of this wise, graceful and shrewd witness.

The consistent quality of all the interviews must finally be tribute to the technique of the interviewers. Characteristically Brownlow (who actually put the questions) and Gill (who directed and gave suggestions) hurl the credit back and forth. A key illustration of their success is the interview with Jackie Coogan about his work on *The Kid* when he was four years old. Previous television interviews with Coogan have been notably dull and unrevealing. In *Hollywood* he seems to relive the experience and the remarkable emotional empathy which Chaplin invoked for the film.

The constant pitfall in any such enterprise of reminiscence is the fallibility and rosy hues of memory. The extensive filming of these interviews probably enabled the programme makers to excise or correct most lapses of memory. Where recollections still appear questionable, the technique is to counterbalance them, gently, slyly, politely. Adele Rogers St. John, a 20s columnist who was always indulgent to the studios, loyally remembers Louis B. Mayer's paternal concern for the plummeting career of Jack Gilbert. Without comment her remarks are set beside accounts, more realistic, more convincing, and a lot less generous to Mayer, of the relationship of these two antipathetic men.

The interviews were all shot on film, and Brownlow and Gill's whole experience and instinct would have led them to make the entire programmes on film, but

for the discouraging discovery that no laboratory seemed any longer able to make satisfactory dups from black and white. Laboratory after laboratory was tested and the results were consistently dreadful, adducing the predictable excuses: 'What can you expect from these old films?' 'We had the gratification of sitting down in front of some of these awful dups with the executives of the laboratories that had done them. They were mortified: "We're sure we can do better than that," they said. But they couldn't.'

In the outcome the quality of the original was far better reproduced by transferring directly on to magnetic video-tape. The method brought other advantages. It made possible the use of the Polygon telecine machine, permitting precise control of film speeds; and it saved money on making costly optical dups. 'But though the final programmes would be on tape, we wanted to edit it as film,' David Gill says. 'The tape was therefore transferred to film at Vidtronics with the Time-Code printed on every frame. This telerecording was used only as a work print to be intercut with our specially shot film. When we had reached "fine cut", the specially shot film [interviews and graphics] was neg cut, and a show print, consisting of those sections and a lot of blanking representing the telerecording sections, was transferred to a master tape. Meanwhile the editors\*, working with a special chart they had devised, logged the Time-Code for every T/R cut they had made. Using these charts, the video editors then inserted, or filled in, the blank sections of the master tape from the original transfer tapes. Using the Time-Code as a neg cutter would use edge numbers, the tape editing resembled neg-cutting in a conventional

\*The editors, who deserve special mention for their heroic work, were Trevor Waite (supervising), Oscar Webb, Dan Carter.

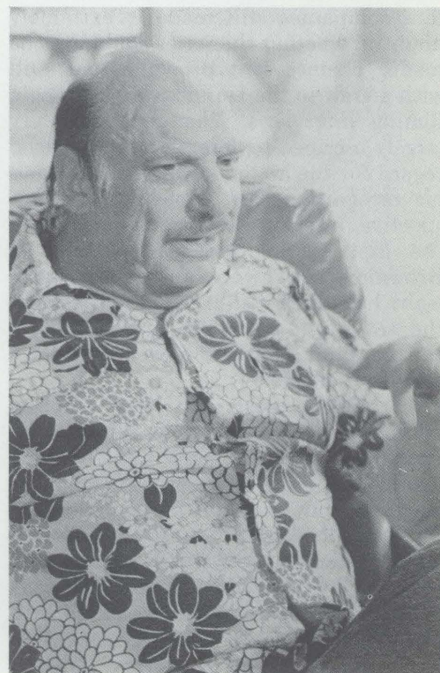
film process. It did not prove as straightforward as that, however.'



Kevin Brownlow and David Gill are credited as co-producers, co-directors and co-writers. They were subject to these peculiar technical considerations and (though Mike Wooller and the film researchers, Raye Farr in New York and Mike Madison in London, did the real worrying) to the hazards of film availability. Beyond that there is no sign at all—and Brownlow can still hardly believe it himself—that they were under any other pressures in the kind of programme they made. 'Jeremy Isaacs has the gifts of a Thalberg,' they say. Isaacs for his part flatly dismisses the role they attribute to him. 'They just came to me for advice and if they wanted some sort of help.'

Inevitably a number of their closest collaborators were veterans from *The World at War*. As well as Isaacs himself, there were Susan McConachy, Raye Farr, production manager Liz Sutherland, and the composer Carl Davis; and it is impossible not to look for a house style. Emphatically, though, everyone insists that this was neither intended nor planned, and certainly not imposed. Brownlow and Gill believe there is no real similarity at all with *The World at War*: 'Everything about our material was different. Because they were working with newsreels, they achieved a kaleidoscopic effect when dealing with events—whereas, in Hollywood, hardly any of the events were filmed. Of course, both series used the technique of filmed interviews. That gives a basic resemblance.'

Jeremy Isaacs complains that maybe there is too much similarity; but he too insists that it is a question of technique, not of style. 'There is the same basic combination of elements—talk and film. It is the same approach of taking public source material and trying to bring out some aspect of that material by adding eye-witness accounts of people who were there. The essence of the thing is the same: to acquire the best material you can and to add commentary and music





that will do as much as possible to enhance its significance. The peculiar limitations are the same of course. You are shaping your material into segments of fifty-two minutes and thirty seconds; and each one of these is exactly divided in two by a commercial break. There has to be some structural similarity.'

Any resemblance may be emphasised by the contribution to both programmes (as well as to *Destination America*) of the same composer, Carl Davis. Although he responds differently and sensitively to disparate material, Davis is a composer with his own strongly defined musical personality. For *Hollywood* he was contributing between thirty and forty minutes of music to each programme.

Had he been born fifty years earlier, he says, he feels sure that he would have been a silent film musician. His problem was to recreate the impression that the music conveyed to audiences of the 1910s and 20s. Although he collected vast numbers of original scores and cue sheets and themes from the period ('people are still throwing those things away'), he found that to use them as they stood would no longer have the same effect upon audiences. Before the spread of radio, the public at large had much less awareness even of the most popular classical music. At that time musicians could include in their scores extracts from *Romeo and Juliet* or the *Pathétique* or bits of Wagner and they would still have the impact of unfamiliarity, where today they would seem laughably hackneyed and cliché.

In hardly any case, then, did he use the score as originally prescribed for a film. An exception is Joseph Carl Breil's music for *Birth of a Nation*, which was used to accompany every extract of the film. The use of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' over Griffith's 'Ride of the Klan' still produces a stunning effect—heightened, even, by the cross-reference to Coppola's use of the same music over the napalm raid in *Apocalypse Now*. (Was Coppola, perhaps, himself aware of the allusion?)

Davis' problem then was to compose or compile music which would as nearly as possible convey the kind of sensation the



Allan Dwan on location for an unidentified Western of the 20s. Below: Dwan 'the undisputed star'.

audience originally experienced, adding the 'forty per cent of the emotion' of which King Vidor speaks; and at the same time to provide necessary cross-references where film extracts were used not only in their own right, but to reveal something about people's personal lives and careers. So—adopting a technique of silent scores themselves—he uses a system of leitmotifs, introducing a Clara Bow theme, a Garbo theme, and so on.

The series developed its own conventions. For later films the scores were performed by full orchestra. For pre-1915 pictures, however, the accompaniment was a solo piano, played by Carl Davis himself. In a running-in period when he was exploring the feel of the period music, he gave a weekly performance for the crew, improvising an entire silent film accompaniment. 'I more than anyone else had the feeling of the original experience, standing in front of a sixty-piece orchestra, with Garbo on the screen in front of me . . . It was a great experience. At one time we all had hopes of persuading Thames to sponsor a full-scale orchestral performance of, say, a Griffith film.'

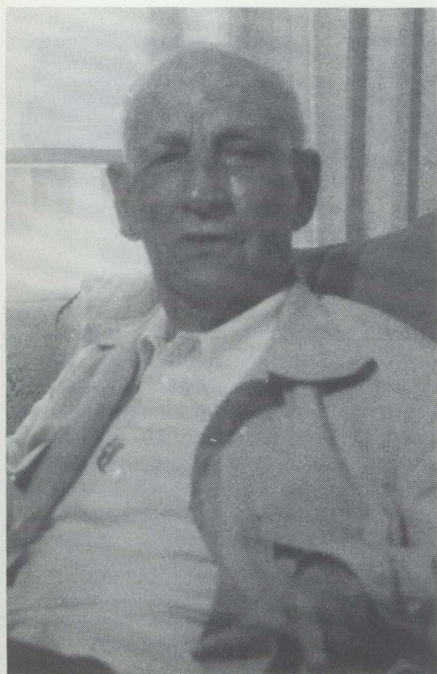


*Hollywood* is over, at least until the next transmission. For the true silent aficionados it had become, in thirteen weeks, a way of life. 'I am very sad,' writes Rex Ingram's biographer and the Irish romantic of film history, Liam O'Leary, in a letter, 'that the television *Hollywood* series has ended.' Film people less committed to the silent cause might complain of this and that, of the too brief extracts, the inevitable omissions, the actor-commentary by James Mason; but they all were forced to marvel at the heroism of the achievement, from everyone's point of view. Some of the television critics, who seem less open to the sense of wonder, were churlish, however. They

complained of sentimental indulgence, of lack of social and critical context, of yet another series about old films . . . It is to be hoped that this did not impair either Thames' justifiable pride, or their chances of that little bit of heaven prescribed by the IBA at the end of the 60s when the commercial companies were enjoined to include more factual material in their programming.

The viewing ratings in terms of *Crossroads* or *This Is Your Life* were not vast, but the series sustained its ten to twelve million viewers, which is very good for documentary (it compares with *The World at War*) and is miraculous for silent movies. It is hard to measure how profoundly or how permanently it may have affected the response to silent pictures; but the attendance at the Victoria and Albert 'Art of Hollywood' exhibition was phenomenal; and the National Film Theatre attendances for silent films in the MGM season have been more than respectable. After *Hollywood* showed a haunting fragment of *The Wind* there was a rash of requests for the film to be shown.

The *Hollywood* people themselves hope that Thames might be stimulated, perhaps the next time the series comes round, to exploit the mingled curiosity and frustration aroused by the series' samplings of silent classics to experiment with showing silent films—complete and with proper musical accompaniments instead of the usual electronic organs and crude sound effects. Even if nothing else has been achieved, Kevin Brownlow can count at least thirty new converts to the cause of the silent picture. The mutual admiration and friendliness and enthusiasm of the *Hollywood* unit as a whole must be something exceptional. 'I think,' says Isaacs, 'that every single person on the programme felt when it ended, "Tomorrow's the first day of the rest of your life".'







John Stahl directs 'The Child Thou Gavest Me' (1921); cameraman Ernest Palmer cranks a Bell and Howell 2709—the stills camera registers his hand as a blur

# SILENT FILMS

## what was the right speed?

The silent film died, commercially, fifty years ago. Since then a swarm of misconceptions have obscured a great deal of fascinating history. Ask people to describe a silent film, and they'll tell you they were 'jerky', like the Chaplins they've seen on television, or they'll talk about 'flicker' and 'bad photography'. The last two charges can often be laid at the door of modern laboratories, for the original prints were generally superior to the black and white they produce today. But the idea that silent films were 'jerky' is less easily dismissed. Shown at the

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**BY KEVIN BROWNLOW**

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right speed, of course, they move as smoothly as a modern film—but what *was* the right speed?

Silent films have more mechanical drawbacks than other antiques—you can't even look at them without the right equipment. And the 'right' equipment is generally wrong. 16mm sound projectors are fitted with a switch marked 'silent' and 'sound'. The latter indicates the standard speed for sound films—24

frames per second. 'Silent' is supposed to do the same for silent films. But it doesn't. It merely indicates the speed for films photographed on clockwork home-movie cameras—16 or 18 frames per second. The fact that some silents were photographed at this speed is a happy coincidence. But it has given rise to the illusion that *all* silent films, professional and amateur, were photographed at 16 frames per second. And they weren't. I have interviewed many cameramen who worked on silent pictures, and I have asked them, again and again, about the



question of speeds. They always give me the same answer. 'The standard speed was sixteen.' When confronted by evidence that it wasn't, they looked puzzled. But they never shift from their position. And hardly any of them has offered a satisfactory explanation.

To try to sort it out, I have done research in the trade papers of the time. I discovered the controversy popping up throughout the silent era. For the silent film placed responsibility on the projectionist in a way the sound film never did.

This came into sharp relief when I began work with David Gill on the *Hollywood* series for Thames Television. We were faced with doing the programmes on film, and initial tests with various laboratories proved very disappointing. Laboratories could reproduce neither the tonal range nor the sharpness of the original nitrate prints. What was worse, they could not alter the speed satisfactorily. They could stretch-print the film—by using an optical printer, they could print every third frame twice to give the equivalent of 16 fps—but this only increased the problem. 16 fps was too slow for most silent films, and the stretching tended to give the action a hiccup effect which was most distracting.

After further tests, and long discussions with our supervising editor, Trevor Waite, we decided to abandon the conventional approach and to make the series on videotape. This gave us complications galore, but at least it preserved as much of the photographic quality as the television line system would allow and, even more important, it enabled us to alter the speed without destroying the action. We used a variable speed telecine machine called a Polygon. Because they are virtually obsolete, suitable Polygons in Britain exist only at the BBC—which has both 16mm and 35mm models. Fitted with a 28-sided prism—'The Flying Ash-tray'—the Polygon enables you to transfer film to videotape at any speed from 4 fps to 35 fps.

The Polygon has a deficiency of its own; under about 16 fps any lateral movement is subject to 'image drag'. The Polygon prism actually 'mixes' from frame to frame, so that at slow speeds one's persistence of vision tends to retain the double image, giving the 'drag' effect. This was a drawback we had to accept to a certain degree (no doubt people will blame that on the crudity of the early films, too!). There was a loss of picture quality compared to other telecines, too. In other respects, the Polygon was a godsend. It was particularly fascinating to run the early films, altering the speed until the movement seemed absolutely right. A pattern emerged that seemed related to the year of production, the studio and, of course, the cameraman.

Yet these speeds seldom corresponded with the speeds at which the films were shown in the theatres. It is possible to check these because they were specified on the cue sheets. These cue sheets were issued to the musical directors of the theatres, and contained musical suggestions. The same sheets were available for the projectionists. 'Examination of hundreds of cue sheets for silent films,'

said James Card, former curator of George Eastman House, 'has failed to turn up a single one which indicates a film should be projected at 16 frames a second.'

The cue sheets were often quite emphatic. For *The Four Horsemen* they insisted: 'The correct speed is 12½ minutes per 1,000 ft.—not any slower—and mark off, then make sure and hold it. Speedometer should be used and film should be run registering 86 revolutions per minute.' Speed: 21½ fps. The chart on the next page offers some fascinating comparisons.

The Polygon method is not definite proof of the original camera speed, for it is entirely dependent on the eye of the person in charge. Everyone has a slightly different sense of rhythm; I tended to favour a frame or two faster than David Gill, for instance. And one can check back at our Polygon sheets and see that a film transferred at 22 fps at one session might run at 21 or 23 at another. But while it may not be scientific, the Polygon is the best guide to film speed since projectors abandoned tachometers.

The opportunity for television filmmakers to achieve the correct speed will soon be widely available. The new generation of Ampex VPR tape machines—with variable speed capacity—will give even greater control, for they permit a reduction to the equivalent of 4-5 fps without image drag, and with no loss of definition.

Controversy over speed dogged silent films from the start. Thomas Edison recommended a speed of 46 frames per second—'anything less will strain the eye.' As historian Gordon Hendricks wrote in his book *The Edison Motion Picture Myth*: 'There would seem to be no good reason for it. This rate was far above any rate necessary for gaining the persistence of vision.' H. A. V. Bulleid points out, however, that Edison's decision was a sensible one: 'To obviate flicker from white light projected on a bright surface requires about 48 obscurations per second.\*' Nevertheless, Edison films did not follow this recommendation for long. Apart from anything else, it used too much film. It also reduced the exposure, and film stock was not fast. But Edison films were photographed much faster than the films of most other companies—although Hendricks found them varying as much as 15 fps in a single day. An Edison film of 1900 will generally project satisfactorily at 24 fps. Edison's rival, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, used a camera which weighed 1700 lbs. This camera had a motor, and it turned at a speed of 40 fps. Billy Bitzer operated one. (Curiously, his later films were characterised by a remarkably slow camera speed.)

During the Nickelodeon period, films were projected at whatever speed suited the management. The standard was supposed to be 16 fps. 'I remember running a full 1,000 ft. reel in 12 minutes at the eight o'clock show,' recalled Víctor Milner, who later became a leading

\*This was later achieved, of course, by the design of the shutter.

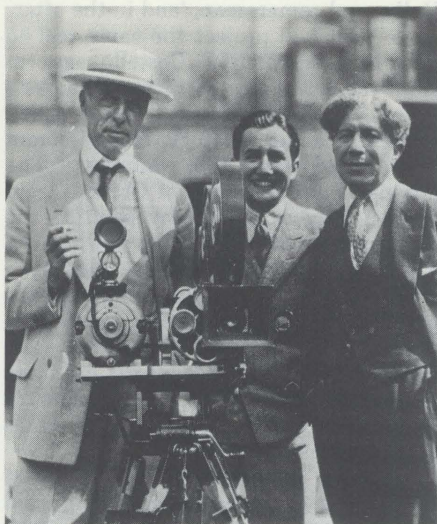
Hollywood cameraman, 'and in the afternoon I used to project the same reel so slow it took Maurice Costello ages to cross the set. Those were my manager's orders.' Projected at the 'correct' speed of 16 fps, a full 1,000 ft. reel of 35mm film would last 16½ minutes. The Essanay Film Company of Chicago tried to beat wily exhibitors by printing the running time of the films on the posters. The exhibitors retaliated by pasting a strip of paper over the line. Some unscrupulous theatre managers could get through a full reel in six minutes! Ten minutes was acknowledged to be 'more usual'. Yet, even today, on standard 24 fps sound projectors, 1,000 feet takes eleven minutes...

'There is no hard and fast rule that can be laid down governing speed,' said *Moving Picture World* (9 May 1908, p. 413). 'It may, however, be said that 70 feet per minute is about as fast as a film should be run under any circumstances, with 45 as the limit the other way. Slower than 40 feet would not be safe. In general, the film should be run at the speed that will produce a minimum of flicker, combined with the lifelike, natural motion of the figures... It is as likely as not that the speed should be changed several times in different portions of the same film. With most standard machines, one turn of the crank runs off exactly one foot of film, so that normal speed is about 66 turns of the crank per minute, and by counting turns you know just how fast you are running.'

Projectionists might speed up Edison one- and two-reelers with relative impunity. But Biographs looked ridiculous at anything above the so-called standard 16. By 1913, even that speed was too fast. The chief Biograph director, D. W. Griffith, appeared to be struggling against the limitations of the one- and two-reeler. (The following year, he would embark on his epic *The Birth of a Nation* in 12 reels.) By slowing the speed of the camera (and therefore the projector) he could squeeze in extra sequences and extend his story. Biograph instructed exhibitors to project their films so that a full 1,000 ft. reel lasted *eighteen minutes*—15 fps.

The highly inflammable nitrate film had to move slowly past the searing heat of the arc lamp. On most projectors, the fire shutter would descend and cut off the light if they moved below 40 ft. per minute. Projectionists often ignored the 18 minute-per-thousand rule. One might assume that reports that his actors were zipping across the screen would horrify Griffith, and he would increase the speed of his camera to suit the standard projection speed. Not at all. Some sequences of *The Birth of a Nation* are so undercranked that they need to be shown at 12 fps. Griffith, and his cameraman Billy Bitzer, continued to crank slower than average on all the major features they made together. And because Griffith's films are the most frequently revived of all American silent films, film societies religiously switch their projectors to 'silent' for Griffith films—and all other silent pictures. The speed is not slow enough for Griffith—and is ruinously slow for other films.





D. W. Griffith, Carl Laemmle Jr. and exhibitor Sid Grauman with the Movietone recording camera used for synchronising talking sequences in 'Lonesome' (1928). The camera is a Bell and Howell 2709 fitted with a 1,000 foot magazine and a motor considerably heavier than the old Cinemotor. (Unfortunately the 2709 made too much noise for sound films, and it was retired to work on special effects and animation.)

But not even Griffith was consistent. His instructions for *Home Sweet Home* (1914) recommended 16 minutes for the first reel (16.6 fps), 14-15 minutes for the second (17.8-19 fps), and 13-14 for each of the other reels (19-20.5 fps). 'The last reel, however, should be run slowly from the beginning of the allegorical part to the end' (*Moving Picture World*, 20 June 1914 p. 652). 'The projectionist,' said Griffith, 'in a large measure is compelled to redirect the photoplay.'

A 1915 projectionist's handbook declared—in emphatic capitals—'THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SET CAMERA SPEED.' The correct speed of projection, it added, is the speed at which each individual scene was taken—'which may—and often does—vary wildly.' And it declared: 'One of the highest functions of projection is to watch the screen and regulate the speed of projection to synchronise with the speed of taking.'

The reason that films of this period were sometimes shown too fast was that exhibitors worked to iron-bound schedules. For a 7-reel show, lasting 1 hr. 50 mins., each reel could be run at an average 15.7 mins. per reel (around 17 fps). But if there were 9 reels, the projectionist had to speed up to 12.2 mins. (about 22 fps) in order that the show could end precisely on time. Nevertheless, the fact that silent pictures were invariably shown slightly faster than they were shot was confirmed by historian David Shepard. When for example he worked on the restoration of *Nanook of the North* (1922), he found that Flaherty had shot the film at 16 fps—but the pace and rhythm of the edited feature was completely destroyed by so slow a speed.'

Exhibitors declared in the 1920s that the standard speed was much faster than it used to be, because cameramen varied their rate of cranking so much. The Hollywood cameramen were indignant. Victor Milner stated in the *American*

## Comparison of probable camera speeds (as indicated by Polygon) and projection speeds (as specified by cue sheets)

		Camera		Projector	Cameraman	Studio
BLIND HUSBANDS	1919	16	?		Ben Reynolds	Universal
FOOLISH WIVES	1921	16	18		Reynolds/Wm Daniels	Universal
THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE	1921	20	21		John Seitz	Metro
MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE	1924	18	24*		Harry Fischbeck	FP-Lasky
ROBIN HOOD	1922	19	22		Arthur Edeson	United Artists
SCARAMOUCHE	1923	19	22		John Seitz	Metro
MERRY WIDOW	1925	19	24		Oliver Marsh	MGM
BEN-HUR	1925	19	22		Various	MGM
THE CROWD	1928	20	24		John Arnold	MGM
SHOW PEOPLE	1928	20	24		John Arnold	MGM
FLESH AND THE DEVIL	1926	20	23		Wm Daniels	MGM
MYSTERIOUS LADY	1928	20	24		Wm Daniels	MGM
THE BLACK PIRATE	1926	20	24		Henry Sharp	United Artists
LILAC TIME	1928	20	24		Sid Hickox	First National
LOVE	1927	20	24		Wm Daniels	MGM
THE EAGLE	1925	22	24		Geo Barnes	United Artists
WEDDING MARCH	1928	22	24		Hal Mohr	Paramount
THE STRONG MAN	1926	22	24		Elgin Lesley	First National
WHAT PRICE GLORY?	1926	22	24		Barney McGill	Fox
TRAIL OF 98	1928	22	24		John Seitz	MGM
WOMAN OF AFFAIRS	1928	24	24		Wm Daniels	MGM
THE GENERAL†	1926	24	24		Dev Jennings	United Artists
DOCKS OF NEW YORK	1928	24	24		Hal Rosson	Paramount
QUEEN KELLY	1928	24	24		Paul Ivano/G. Pollock	United Artists

\*Cue sheet specifies: 'Do not run at normal speed of 85 feet per minute, but 90 as we feel the film requires it.'

†H. A. V. Bulleid, who knows this film well, is convinced its ideal screening speed is 20 fps.

*Cinematographer*, in July 1923, that the average camera speed was still 16 fps, sixteen minutes, forty seconds per thousand. 'To achieve smoothness of tempo, projection should also be at this speed.' He pointed out that rushes were shown every day at the studios, on the most modern projectors. The operator had an indicator, and there was another indicator on the director's desk. It was set between 65 and 72 feet per minute. 'If a scene shows the wrong speed, it is retaken.' Already, Milner has weakened his argument. For he has admitted that films, allegedly photographed at 16, were being checked at a speed approaching 19. In the same article, Milner enlisted the support of director Rex Ingram; he declared that he was very careful to achieve perfect speed. Yet the films of Rex Ingram, photographed by John Seitz, registered between 19 fps and 22 fps on the Polygon, and his cue sheets specified from 21-24 fps.

In 1925, director Al Rogell wrote in *Director* magazine: 'At a recent meeting, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers advocated a universal set speed for projection of 80 feet per minute (21.3 frames per second). As a matter of fact, most theatres show pictures at a speed of 85-90 ft. per minute (22.6 fps - 24 fps) in these days of long shows with 10-11 reels of film and various entertainment acts.'

That same year (1925) the head of a theatre chain in Indiana claimed that 24 fps was now the standard speed. Again the cameramen denied it. Paul Perry, in the *American Cinematographer*, claimed that he had checked with his colleagues and found the majority cranking at—you've guessed it—16 fps, 60 feet per minute. The Polygon may not be a definitive scientific instrument, but no film of 1925 we put through had been shot at 16 fps. Yet Perry let slip a hint that cameramen had been asked to turn faster: 'If the theatres insist on faster

projection, it is only natural that some of the producers request that their film be exposed more rapidly to offset the increased speed of projection.'

Karl Malkames, the son of silent era cameraman Don Malkames, and a cameraman himself, wrote to me recently: 'The practice of cranking from 20 to 24 to compensate for rising theatrical projection speeds was common while my father was at Fox in 1924. Bell and Howell equipment continued to reflect the idea of 16 fps as "normal". The shutter speed plate on my later model Bell and Howell, circa 1930, is still calibrated for 16 fps.'

The Bell and Howell 2709 camera became the standard studio model of the 1920s. Two turns of the handle sent one foot of film through the gate—one foot of film contained sixteen frames of picture, so two turns per second equalled sixteen frames, the 'standard' speed. Cameramen prided themselves on their even rate of cranking. To achieve it, you said 'One hundred and one' to yourself, over and over, until the speed came naturally. One cameraman hummed the 'Anvil Chorus' from *Il Trovatore*. While the speed was undoubtedly even, how could they know precisely what their speed was? Could they honestly say they were cranking at 16 and not 18 frames per second? For there was no speed indicator on the Bell and Howell.

Kemp Niver has interviewed a number of silent-era cameramen for the American Society of Cinematographers. 'To a man, they said that unless there was some specific reason... they tried to maintain 16 fps. No cameraman could make a statement that he cranked at a specific speed and prove it unless he had a stop watch at the start and end of a given number of feet of film. Even then he couldn't guarantee that he wasn't under-cranking or over-cranking as the tension on the take-up magazine increased.'





While shooting *'Wings'* (1927), chief cameraman Harry Perry spent much of his time in the air. Yet he preferred to crank the camera by hand—it was more reliable than a motor which, in any case, required a heavy set of batteries. The Akeley camera was designed for rapid movement, and for extra mobility Perry has fixed it to a machine-gun mounting.

A motor was available for the Bell and Howell, with a speed indicator. Predictably, 16 fps is marked *NORMAL*. The top speed is 22 fps. In production stills, this motor appears more and more often towards the end of the 20s. In the old days, they said they preferred hand cranking. So why the motor? Perhaps because of the increased demands of the mobile camera—now far more common—which needed more manipulation than the static camera. And perhaps because a standard speed had at last arrived. In October 1927 *The Jazz Singer* had been premiered, and theatres were being wired for sound. The standard speed of sound films was 24 fps. It is interesting to discover how that speed was arrived at.

According to Stanley Watkins, head engineer for Western Electric, he and his team checked with the Warner Theatre for the average speed of projection in 1926. They were told 'between eighty and ninety feet per minute' in the big theatres—between 20 and 24 fps—and around 26 fps in the smaller theatres. They settled on 90 feet a minute (24 fps) as a reasonable compromise for the Vitaphone process.\* The other sound systems began at slower speeds (Fox-Case's first tests were shot at 21 fps), but they, too, adopted 24 fps as standard in November 1926.

If Hollywood cameramen were still working rigidly at 16 fps, their work would have looked ludicrous in the public theatres. The fact that they were cranking the films slower than they were projected is borne out by *The Jazz Singer*: Al Jolson walks to the stage at a slightly accelerated pace, and when the Vitaphone section begins, he is filmed at 24 fps. Filmgoers often remarked that the early talkies seemed leaden-footed.

While filming *Annapolis* in 1928,

\*One reason for world standards accepting 24 fps was that it permitted flickerless projection with a 2-blade shutter. (H. A. V. Bulleid).

cameraman Arthur Miller received a wire from the studio to crank at 24 fps. He did so, and everyone complained that the speed slowed everything down too much—it was particularly noticeable in a dress parade scene of midshipmen.

Walter Kerr, in his brilliant book *The Silent Clowns*, puts forward his theory: silent films were photographed at 16 or 18 frames a second, but projected at a rate closer to sound speed. 'The result was not only faster than life, it was cleaner, less effortful, more dynamic.' Kerr illustrates his theory with a photograph of the instructions printed on the leader for the 1922 *Down to the Sea in Ships*: 'Operator: please run eleven minutes for 1,000 ft.'—or 24 fps, the speed of sound. I have projected the film, and found two or three sections too fast at that speed (although the remainder is satisfactory). But that was how audiences saw it at the time. Other, later films, such as *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, were shot at a speed so close to 24 fps that they are wrecked by being shown at 16 fps. I have even seen an occasional silent, such as *The Blood Ship* (1928) apparently designed to be projected at 26 fps, since sound speed is too slow for them. (Poverty Row producers like Columbia, who made *The Blood Ship*, ordered cameras to be cranked faster to fill their reels more economically!)

Talking about comedies, Walter Kerr writes: 'Silent films chose, by control of the camera and through instructions to projectionists, to move at an unreal, stylised, in effect fantasised rate.' And he quotes as examples the last two silent Chaplins—both films designed to be shown at sound speed, but photographed at silent speed (whatever that was!). 'The least glance at *Modern Times* reveals instantly that all of Chaplin's work in the film... has been filmed at a rate that puts springs on his heels and makes unleashed jack-knives of his elbows. This

is how the films looked when they were projected as their creators intended.'

One can only have sympathy for those who programme silent films. But sympathy evaporates as soon as one has to endure slow projection. It's bad enough to be deprived of the sound of the symphony orchestra (which accompanied all first-run films in the big theatres), but to be forced to watch the films in dead silence at an equally deadly pace is too much to ask of anyone. William Wellman's spectacular war film *Wings* (1927) moves at an exhilarating pace when projected at the speed at which it was shown originally—24 fps—but it drags miserably when shown at 16. At one of its last major showings in Britain, a few years ago, the audience emerged complaining of its slowness. Their complaints were not aimed at the projectionist, for they thought it was an inherent fault of all silent films. Yet it had been shown at 16 fps—and had lasted nearly an hour longer than in 1927. That attitude shows no respect towards the films of the past. It does them a grave disservice.

'Ideally,' says David Gill, 'projectors should have variable speeds from at least 14 to 24 fps. There was no standard for the normal camera speed in the silent days, and for commercial reasons, the recommended projection speeds do not necessarily match the camera speed. We could recommend that most silents be shown at 24—but that means that silent film actors will always move in crisp, sharp movements—never smooth and languorous ones. This is fine for actors in comedies, war films and some Westerns. But it's sad for the others—especially the *Great Lovers*!'

Grateful thanks for invaluable help in the preparation of this article to David Gill, George Pratt, H. A. V. Bulleid, David Shepard, Karl Malkames, Kemp Niver.



Sir Lancelot lay with a hole in his naked side as King Arthur and Queen Guinevere begged Merlin to save his life. 'I think we'll put a little silver bowl under the wound,' said John Boorman, and receptacles materialised instantly around him, ranging in size from egg-cups to basins. His choice, polished to a dazzle, was rammed into the ribs of a wincing Lancelot even while further bowls were being brought at a run from distant corners. 'It looks nice there,' he said, as they juggled it into camera range. 'It's a link with the Chalice.' Lancelot, wound and bowl were squirted with crimson, but Boorman was dissatisfied. 'We'll need a lot more blood,' he said. A fine rain of the real stuff began to fall from a lighting technician who had cut his hand above the set. When John Boorman directs, it seems nothing is denied him.

The National Film Studios of Ireland, if you can locate them among the magnificent glens of County Wicklow (the clue is a turning signposted 'Elvis: the King of Rock & Roll'), function modestly

## BY PHILIP STRICK

on a diet of commercials and co-productions while awaiting the Irish Film Bill that could provide substantial government support. But what at present brings them to life is their chairman, John Boorman, who weaves the kind of magic that periodically turns visions into hard cash. At such times it is as though the Studios were his alone, a convenient adjunct to his home in the Irish hills and staffed as if by members of his own family.

Some of them *are* his family; the new film reveals startling amounts of Katrina Boorman, who is raped to produce the infant King Arthur, while 12-year-old Charlie Boorman appears as the young Mordred, fated to strike the blow that will send Arthur to Avalon. Production assistant to the unit is Telsche Boorman, interrupting her studies in Paris to hover at the parental elbow providing food, horses, crones, continuity, and multilingual criticism as the occasion demands. The atmosphere is one of amiable insult, as Boorman organises, challenges and harries his team with an affection that is amply returned. There's no question about who is in control, but there is no restriction on ideas offered, contributions considered, inspirations acknowledged. As an example of a benevolent autocracy, it is impressive and appealing.

Autonomy nevertheless has its price. There is the question of the film's title, for example, which at this stage in the production has become *Knights* after it was discovered that the name of Merlin posed copyright problems. Boorman's original had been called *Merlin Lives*, and various permutations had followed in which familiar Arthurian icons—Excalibur, the Grail, the Round Table—had been juggled into juxtapositions that might attract success at the world's box-office. Boorman wasn't too enthusiastic about the *Knights* label, but if that was what Orion wanted, they should have it.

'My deal with Orion Pictures is that I bring the film to them complete, with no fees to producer, director or writer; it

JOHN BOORMAN'S

# merlin



gives them a good start, and in return it allows me to make the film in my own way. They were very courageous, in Hollywood terms, in agreeing to let me make it without super-stars in a genre for which nobody knows whether there's an audience. It's a very complex film, with costumes, armour, action sequences, horses, crowd scenes, big sets, optical effects of almost every kind, and I have made it in a very economical way, everything very carefully planned. But with the collapse of the dollar, the rise of inflation, the trebling in price of film stock and all the other things that have happened, what was conceived of nine months ago as an eight million dollar budget is now closer to ten million. So for Orion the risk is that much greater, and they want to emphasise the action aspects of the story in a title that will help to sell it.'

Boorman and his *Merlin* project have been together for many years. His film editor now is John Merritt, who also cut *Zardoz* and was Boorman's editor when in 1962 he joined the BBC's Documentary Film Unit in Bristol and ran a weekly magazine programme. 'It was about anything that took his fancy, really,' says

Merritt. 'He gradually increased the amount of film used in the programmes until they became half-hour films, and then he turned his documentaries into dramas because he just wasn't the *cinéma-vérité* type. He would look at a situation and then mould the action a little to make it more interesting dramatically; rather than take things as they came, he wanted to use his own timing and emphasis—and his own theme. And you know, the theme was pretty consistent: it was the idea of a search, a quest for something that might change people's lives. It might end in failure, but the hunt itself was what mattered. One of his most ambitious BBC productions was a 75-minute film called *The Quarry*, which was a mass of Arthurian references; the central character was called Arthur and there were allusions to Merlin and magic. The Arthur in that film was a sculptor, and his quest was for a certain kind of stone—the word "quarry" had a double meaning. I suppose John has been quarrying for most of his career.'

On the studio back-lot, bordered by mountains and housing developments in surprising proximity, Boorman conducts





what he terms a 'walkabout' at the end of each day's shooting. Attended by some twenty designers, props men, and advisers bearing charts, scripts and wooden stakes, he resembles an architect surveying a building site on which centuries-old structures are being fashioned from polystyrene. Together they stare at a pit into which a horse is to plunge on its way across a bridge of mist; the scene is unfurled for the unit in story-board form, tiny vivid sketches showing horse, mist and distant castle, and although all they have before them is the raw earth Boorman seems to fashion it into supernatural drama as they watch. 'Wally will look after the stars,' he says, and the legendary special effects master Wally Veevers, dapper and shining among the jeans and casuals of the rest, nods with a mixture of reassurance and resignation. He's used to supplying stars for night skies; the mist and the castle are already his domain, and if need be he could put the horse on the screen as well.

Boorman moves on to a more elaborate piece of sculpture, the towering façade of a castle that is to be the resting place of the Grail. Assembled from timbers, plywood and fresh paint, it reveals itself



Far left: Nicol Williamson, in shining silver skull-cap, as Merlin. Left above: the golden mask of Mordred. Above: John Boorman adjusting the mask for Mordred (Robert Addie); a fallen knight; Boorman in his castle.



from the front as a silver miracle, its drawbridge opening on to a vista of giant steps worthy of Fritz Lang's films of the Niebelungen. A volunteer is sent to test the strength of the drawbridge ('Mick!' calls the production manager, hastily adding a surname as six Irish faces turn) and dangles in mid-air as the director watches the construction jerk erratically. They leave him there for a while, ridiculed by one of the stuntmen, as Boorman stands in what is to be the moat and discusses how they will keep the camera dry. Finally he can't resist getting on the drawbridge himself, and two of the unit appear from nowhere, with exquisite timing, to support him as he slips on wet paint. 'It's the D. W. Griffith in me,' he admits, as someone reminds him of one of the more famous Boorman documentaries. In the evening light, the silver walls reflect the trees they face and the castle seems to merge with the foliage. 'Just what I want,' says Boorman. 'The whole story takes place under the canopy of the forest. It grows naturally from it.'

Other bits of other castles are scattered around the Studio's sound stages. For the film's earliest scenes, they are grim, cavernous and dark; later they become grand, warmly lit, with arcades that stretch into the far distance (although if you look at them closely they shrink to a few yards; the rest is cunning perspective). 'The trouble with existing castles,' said Boorman, 'is that they are either in ruins or they have been modernised through different periods so they don't look right. And, after all, the concept of Camelot is that it's something new, not crumbling and old. Also we are trying to avoid linking it with any specific style, although one constantly slips into the Gothic, the Roman, the Indian, the Norman. It's Middle Earth, really, that we're looking at. I've spent a lot of time in Middle Earth, I know it well, but it's not a style that everyone else is instantly familiar with.'

The rough-cut of *Knights*, at this point about forty minutes of what will be more than two hours, reflects a whole range of influences. In the forest, armoured figures gallop into ferocious conflict that recalls standard medieval melodrama, but with disconcerting differences. A battle rages on a seashore, balls of flame hurtling through the air, and through the smoke the angular figure of Merlin stalks in hooded fury to argue with Uther Pendragon. Anachronism and fantasy colour the dialogue as archers release volleys of arrows.

'I can only use these crowds, take over an entire studio, have more than sixty suits of armour specially made, if I can raise the money,' Boorman remarked with relish, 'and I've been trying to raise the money for this film for ten years. Five years ago, all I got was embarrassed smiles when people were confronted with the Merlin story. Then suddenly the mood changed, they decided they couldn't go on making science fiction films for ever but people obviously wanted fantasy, so maybe there was something in this one. Suddenly the line between Superman and Conan seemed to fade, and there were seven or eight medieval subjects floating around. After all,

*Star Wars* is a straight transposition of the Arthurian story—Guinness is the Merlin character, Mark Hamill is the boy Arthur suddenly chosen to be King, it's very clear. So Ridley Scott wanted to make a medieval story, Steven Spielberg wanted to adapt the Mary Stewart book about Merlin (but said he wouldn't do it if I wanted to do the story), and out of nowhere I found four studios bidding for me. The toughest was Orion, but they gave me the freedom I wanted. This thing could so easily be wrecked if it's not done properly.'

If Orion wanted action, the rough-cut certainly indicated they had got it, with knights being transfixed with spears, beheaded with battle-axes, and bowled from their horses in toppling heaps of metal. The armour looks impenetrable, but is in fact light enough to fall about in without injury; made of aluminium, each suit weighs little more than 15 lbs. Resident armourer to the film is Terry English, whose career has been devoted to recreating metal suits for requirements as varied as the Royal Opera House and the Tower of London. Apparently no records exist of how armour was originally constructed, so he and his team made it up as they went along. For *Knights*, they have evolved a reptilian miscellany of horns, tusks and spikes, hauntingly primeval.

Recalling *Zardoz*, one of the most striking of the film's armoured images is the spectacle of the adult Mordred, a golden figure on horseback, with a mask in which beauty and cruelty contrive to be at war. Beaten into shape by Terry English, it was designed by Tony Pratt, who was with Boorman on *Hell in the Pacific*. 'I find him very compatible,' says Boorman, 'and his contribution is enormous. He is one of the few people I can go to who understands what we are trying to do. The other would be Tony Woolard, who was on *Catch Us If You Can* and *Leo the Last* and with whom I was going to do *Lord of the Rings*. Along with John Barry, they were very much part of the same generation, all very well informed about films, very much aware of the historical perspective of filmmaking.'

'Tony Pratt and I worked eight months on the design of the film, working each day on the style, sketching the armour, the masks, the sets, the props. When it's a work of imagination, everything has to be designed from scratch. If you are doing something set in the eighteenth century, they'll look up the reference books and there it is, but in a case like this they even have to ask what the characters will drink out of. So we have thousands and thousands of scale drawings, and everything has to be manufactured from those. And the strange thing is that anything that we have tried to smuggle in, anything that exists already, has always seemed intrusive. We always finally have to make them up.'

In a two-hour conversation, Boorman dodges around the point about the use of masks in both *Zardoz* and *Knights*, but run to earth he concedes an obsession. 'They happen throughout the picture. I think Tony Pratt developed the stone face in *Zardoz*, but it was my idea to

create that image for Mordred. What attracts me about masks is that by taking them on and off you're able to externalise the characters. It's sheer expressionism. In the casting of Mordred [played by Robert Addie, a RADA graduate whose only other film has been Anthony Page's *Absolution*] and the creation of the mask that actually uses part of the actor's face, you are able to show this beautiful yet terrifying figure. You take the mask off, and there is this baby-faced boy. It's the opposite of reality, where any child's face is itself a mask. I find that enormously powerful. And the story demands it, it's a Chinese box of deceptions, stemming from the fact that Arthur himself is conceived by Uther in disguise. Merlin, too, is role-playing, sometimes mocking, sometimes deadly serious.'

Merlin is played by Nicol Williamson, tall, trim-bearded, and in a shining silver skull-cap. Boorman found the part difficult to cast. 'Merlin is the character who has always fascinated me most of all. He's close to Gandalf. He has the humour, the power, the irony. He is intimidatingly more human and less human than ordinary people. I'm very attracted to what Jung sees in Merlin; he interprets him as part of the alchemical tradition, and the alchemists were trying to turn base metal into gold, they were trying to make things better, they were trying to refine. They never succeeded, but in their experiments they discovered science; it was an impossible quest that produced, as a side effect, the knowledge on which the future could be constructed. And Jung said that he felt his investigations into the unconscious carried on the work of the alchemists. In his biography, he says that he had an impulse to carve on the piece of stone in his cottage by the lake (and when you carve on stone, you're carving something of importance, an epitaph, a solemn thing) the legend *Le Cri de Merlin*, the cry of Merlin that was heard in the forest after Merlin had disappeared from life. In other words, Merlin's story is about the coming of consciousness; when Man became conscious, moved into a rational period, he lost his magic. So in the film, Merlin is disappearing, fading out as rational man takes over the world. The magic is still there, but it's no longer part of the foreground, it has passed into the unconscious.'

Boorman disappeared himself at that point to look at a pair of twins, offered for approval by a nervous mother as if she were checking on a Presidential candidate. Nicol Williamson took over, professing monosyllabism but quickly warming to his theme. How did he interpret Merlin, in the mode of T. H. White, of Malory, of someplace else? 'I don't favour the pointed hat and the wand—that just evades the issue. It's no good putting pantomime figures into a real world, or a believable dream world. The characters must live and breathe in it. In one sense, Merlin is the hiatus man, the pauser, the narrator; there's a hell of a lot of action going on, with love stories, great deeds of valour, jousting, lots of glitter, horses, colour, banners, and Merlin is the thread that ties all these



together. But he is nearing his exit as the film proceeds. At the beginning of many scenes you can see him jerk into the living world, pick up the thread of it, but afterwards comes the *lachrymae mundi*, the melancholia. And at times he appears in order to give Uther and Arthur the strength to carry out the things he can't do himself.'

On set, Williamson towering over Boorman, the two of them can be seen moulding their creation into shape. In seven takes, Merlin changes from melancholy to chuckling humour, shared by the clanking, harassed figure of Arthur (Nigel Terry) hurrying along beside him. 'Just honing it slightly,' said Boorman. 'He'll use the seventh take, you'll see,' said Williamson. Both seemed well satisfied.

A conventional question, but one can't help asking. What was it like for an actor to work with Boorman? Williamson directed a quick blast in the direction of *The Human Factor*. 'I thought I had done some of the best work of my film career in that picture. I don't usually see the films I am in, but I was intrigued by what went into the making of that one, and I sneaked a look at it. The *New York Times* said it was marvellous, but actually it was flaccid, it had no immediacy, no punch. There should be a great surface tension on the story, like a skin stretched too tight. But you never knew where you were. Otto Preminger simply had no money—although none of us knew it—and there was a great rush and hurry and it's like something pasted together. Chalk and cheese, Otto and John. Otto's trouble is that he is still living the old Hollywood legend, when everyone always screamed at everyone else, and that's all gone. But John is involved with everyone, he *likes* his actors, he's constantly working with them, and it delights him when they give him the goods.'

And other directors? 'On the whole, I like the directors I have worked with. I don't think you should do anything without meeting a director, you have to sit down and talk about it—and you may find that it just won't do. For a project like this, to work with someone you don't know would be courting disaster. Generally, I've been lucky—Jack Gold, Mike Nichols, Tony Richardson on *Hamlet*, Anthony Page, Herbert Ross. One of the not-so-lucky films was *The Jerusalem File*; it could have been good, but it turned into a mess. I did it at a time when I had just taken a year off and the movie industry had collapsed and no one wanted to know about British actors and British things and everyone moved back to Hollywood. And in that year I got married, and they offered me some money for that film and we had to have a place to live, so I took it. And I swore I'd never do it again. But of course I did do it again. I had to find the money to get divorced.'

Boorman returned, after a session with the twins. He had wanted them only two weeks old, because he needed a new-born baby, couldn't quite persuade anyone to supply one, and knew (having fathered a pair himself) that twins were smaller at two weeks than your average infant. Another advantage was that he would

have a spare baby if one got noisy after a few takes. The problem, as it had turned out, was that Helen Mirren (who plays Morgana, Arthur's evil half-sister) was less experienced in these matters. Industiously giving birth for the camera, while clutching a nude, wet twin between her thighs, she had been unable to relax into her role. 'Afraid she might damage it, or something,' said Boorman cheerfully. 'Tough things, babies. Takes a lot to damage them.' Helen Mirren, it seemed, had also come through unscathed, although Boorman adds that it had been quite a day.

'Earlier we were dealing with an acting problem she had about moving down a staircase on the way to the caves. She



Gabriel Byrne as Uther Pendragon.

said "I feel I should stop here, because to follow Merlin down would look weak." And I said, "You can't stop because it's a movement, luring you down, it has to flow, the dynamics are more important than any acting problem you may feel at this point." Nicol helped us to work that one out together, but it's very hard for actors to work inside the constraints that a film demands. I time scenes very carefully when I am preparing, and I note the timings on rehearsals to find out how I'm complying with the scheme of the film. So I'll say to actors "Speed up those lines," and they say that it doesn't feel right, and I have to point out that it may not feel right in the scene as it stands, but in the dynamic context of the whole it will sound desperately slow and you have got to make it faster.'

Boorman's dynamics, not so long ago, had been more than challenged by his experience with *The Heretic* (1977), the sequel to *The Exorcist*. He seems to have recovered. 'I don't apologise for *The Heretic* and it contains some of the best things I have done. I was fascinated by the ideas in it, and I was given a lot of money and resources to do almost anything I wanted with them. It was a great opportunity to do all kinds of things that in a normal context one wouldn't be able to do, but I suppose I paid the price for that. I was totally shocked by the tremendous antagonism the film generated in the States, which I think had to do with a kind of disappointment in the audience expectation. Rightly, they expected to

see what they had seen before, and they felt cheated.

'Max Von Sydow, when I wanted him to return in that role, said that he had hated the whole experience of making *Exorcist*. "I think that film is abhorrent," he said. "It's about the hatred of children. People go and enjoy seeing a child being tortured." He felt that people were responding unconsciously to a kind of evolutionary trait; if overpopulation becomes a threat to survival then perhaps there is an unconscious antagonism towards children which this film touched upon. It's a horrifying theory, but I pointed out that *Heretic* is a *healing* film, and he agreed that if he had made an error of judgment in doing *Exorcist* he could set things right by appearing in *Heretic*. I think the audience actually resented that, they didn't want the balance. It's a terrible experience when you put a great deal of effort into making a film, and see it torn apart. I saw it with audiences in different parts of the States and it was savaged. But all this was in the first few weeks; after it settled down, people actually looked at it quite calmly.'

Had part of the problem, perhaps, been that *Heretic* had been an international project, a kind of false sequel? Boorman proved to have no patience with the concept of the indigenous movie. 'The fashionable thing to say is that the only films which are really any good are those which are deeply rooted in one place, but that's not my view of cinema. I live in another world, and it's much more connected to the world of dreams; it is more difficult to explore, but easier to communicate to a world audience. People say that the British film industry is bankrupt and in a state of collapse, but the Bond pictures are British, and all through the crises these highly polished films have still been made. What is wrong with British cinema (and I'll be very unpopular for saying this but I'm afraid it's true) is lack of imagination. British cinema clings to social realism, which is an idiom that now belongs to television.'

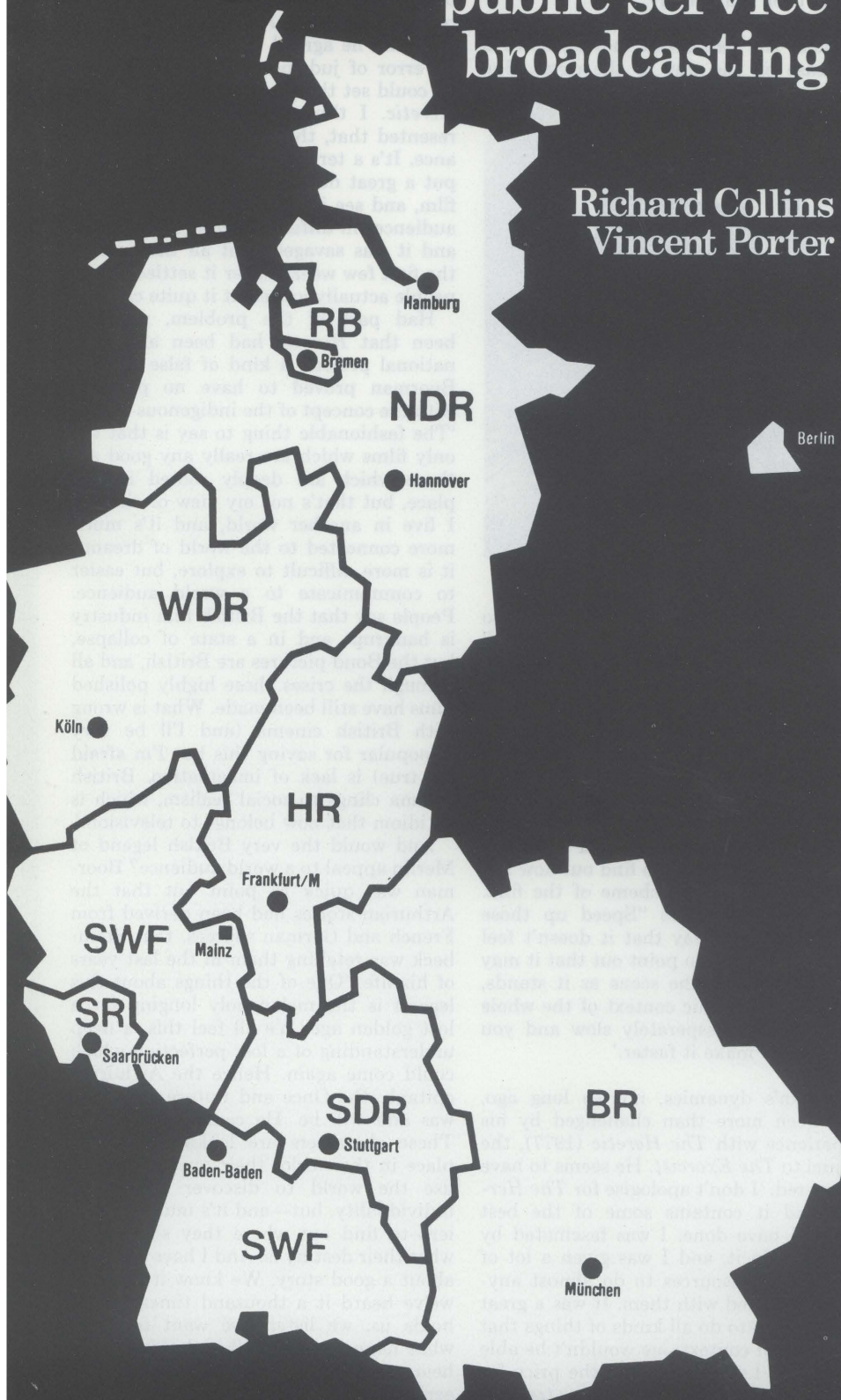
And would the very British legend of Merlin appeal to a world audience? Boorman was quick to point out that the Arthurian stories had been derived from French and German sources, that Steinbeck was retelling them in the last years of his life. 'One of the things about this legend is the melancholy longing for a lost golden age. We all feel this, a deep understanding of a lost perfection which could come again. Hence the Arthurian epitaph: the Once and Future King. He was and will be. He could come again. These characters are looking for their place in the world, their quest is not to use the world to discover their own individuality, but—and it's much healthier—to find out where they should be, what their destiny is. And I have a theory about a good story. We know it already, we've heard it a thousand times, but it holds us, we listen, we want to know what happens next. Why? I think we're hearing echoes of some deep pattern of early happenings in the human race that is now being repeated. Listen carefully to the echoes of myth. It has much more to tell us than the petty lies and insignificant truths of recorded history.'



# WEST GERMAN TELEVISION

## the crisis of public service broadcasting

Richard Collins  
Vincent Porter



Map of West German broadcasting regions adapted from original in the ARD yearbook.

Public service broadcasting in West Germany is under threat. The crisis at Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), one of the major broadcasting stations, exemplifies a conflict that has been endemic in the West German media order and which now threatens to destroy the public service ethos built into broadcasting by the Allied Control Commissions after World War II. The same conflict surfaces in the debates over the most appropriate institutional forms by which to ensure freedom of expression for the new media technologies: a regulated public service system or free competition between separate information providers. Party political conflicts as well as media theories are involved. The SPD (Social Democratic Party) backs a public service system; the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) alliance backs commercial competition.

The current crisis over the future of the Hamburg-based NDR is not simply a local political squabble between the SPD-controlled city of Hamburg and the CDU-controlled *Länder* of Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. It is symptomatic of this deeper structural malaise which is affecting the whole media order. NDR was set up in 1955 by inter-Land treaty between Hamburg, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. Its future is now in jeopardy because of the political ambitions of Ernst Albrecht, the CDU *Minister-Präsident* of Lower Saxony, who has given notice that Lower Saxony will not renew the treaty when it comes up for renewal at the end of 1980.

The reasons, ostensibly, are that NDR was financially mismanaged, showed a lack of balance in its current affairs programming, particularly in its coverage of the proposed nuclear power station at Brokdorf, and that the Hamburg-based programme staff neglected regional affairs. In its place, Albrecht and his fellow CDU *Minister-Präsident* in neighbouring Schleswig-Holstein, Gerhard Stoltenberg, are proposing a new set-up of two commercial stations, one based in Hanover, the other in Kiel, and both loosely organised as the new NDR. At face value the proposals offer increased decentralisation, increased financial resources and a greater accountability to public and political opinion. But the



solution they advance is in many ways contrary to the very specific concept of public accountability on which public service broadcasting in the Federal Republic has been built.

## The Model of the BBC

When the Allies took over the administration of Germany in 1945, they were determined that broadcasting organisations should be established which were independent of state or any other external control. The model of the BBC was particularly influential. In contrast to practice in the USA, the four regional organisations set up in the American zone, Radio Frankfurt, Radio Stuttgart, Radio München and Radio Bremen, were neither privately owned nor financed by commercials; and in contrast to French practice, Südwestfunk, which was set up in Baden-Baden to cover the French zone, was not to be an organ of the state. In the British zone, however, Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) was very closely modelled on the BBC by Hugh Carleton-Greene. It was, he said, to be 'a massive monopoly, conscious of its standing and responsibility as an impartial independent public service.'

As the new institutions were handed over to the nascent Federal Republic, the influence of the BBC model provided Greene and his fellow administrators on the Control Commissions with a problem. Unlike the BBC, which was founded by Royal Charter, the West German broadcasting organisations had no Crown to whom they would be theoretically accountable, and so they became accountable to the various *Länder* of the Federal Republic. (See below for details of the structure.)

In 1953, the various *Land* broadcasting institutions agreed to provide a national television service which was the basis of the ARD network of nine broadcasting stations. Since that time, Bayerischer Rundfunk (Munich), Hessischer Rundfunk (Frankfurt), Norddeutscher Rundfunk (Hamburg), Radio Bremen (Bremen), Süddeutscher Rundfunk (Stuttgart), Sender Freies Berlin (West Berlin), Saarländischer Rundfunk (Saarbrücken), Südwestfunk (Baden-Baden) and Westdeutscher Rundfunk (Cologne) have provided the first and third services of the Federal Republic. The second service is provided by Zweites Deutsche Fernsehen (Mainz), which was set up by an inter-*Land* treaty between all eleven *Länder*, following the decision of the Constitutional Court of 28 February 1961 which ruled that broadcasting was a

matter for the *Länder* and not for the *Bund* (Federation).

From the start, therefore, the public accountability of the German television networks has been intimately involved with politics and politicians in the various *Länder*. Unlike Britain, where the relationships between politicians and broadcasting are heavily disguised, in the Federal Republic they are out in the open, and this in turn has meant a wider range of programmes representing all shades of political opinion.

## A Minimum Balance

The 1961 judgment of the Constitutional Court has formed the bedrock of public service programming policy. It was occasioned by a case brought by the *Länder* against the Federal Government of Konrad Adenauer, charging it with acting unconstitutionally in trying to set up a joint *Bund-Länder* commercial television company, Deutschland Fernsehen GmbH, in which the *Bund* had a majority holding, signed for by Adenauer himself, and in which the *Länder* had a minority holding signed for on their behalf, but against their wishes, by the Federal Minister of Justice.

Not only did the Constitutional Court rule that broadcasting was the responsibility of the *Länder* and not of the Federal Government, but it went on to lay down a number of very specific requirements for a broadcasting organisation. One yardstick was the relationship between the broadcasters and society: 'The promoters of broadcasting programmes must ... be so organised that all relevant forces have an influence in the organs of control and a fair hearing in the overall programme, and that binding principles apply to the content of the overall programme which guarantee a minimum balance in content, impartiality and mutual respect.' (trans. Williams, p. 30.) The crucial concepts here are those of 'a minimum balance' and 'all relevant forces'.

The concept of balance in German is rendered by two words which have different meanings. One, *Ausgewogenheit*, implies a detailed and considered weighing of forces; the second word, *Balance* (borrowed from English), often used by politicians, is close in meaning to *Gleichgewicht*, or of equal weight. In 1970, the second Michel Commission, reacting against two types of programming—those which pursued a bland and featureless neutral path, and those which were simply unimaginatively partisan—produced a more extensive definition for neutrality.

'Neutrality as a task set for broadcasting [is] in no way identical with a kind of abstinence from things political or even party political, nor with a limitation of broadcasting to "the communication of value-free information". Similarly neutrality in no way makes it obligatory to even out all contrasting opinion into a non-committal and innocuous shallow ideology of the general weal, or to conform and think in terms of political apportionment. Differing opinions, incisive analyses, agreement with the individual views of a political group are permissible as long as the right of immediate reply for the other group, the right to present the other opinion, is guaranteed, as long as broadcasting in its entirety is not attached to one political group and the balance of differing opinions and therefore also a general impartiality is guaranteed. Neutralisation therefore does not mean a levelling off of the selection offered, it simply means that the programmes are not predetermined to the line of any particular social or political power group.' (trans. Williams, p. 82)

Within the ARD programme, therefore, the current affairs programme *Panorama* (SPD), produced by NDR, alternates with *Report* (CDU/CSU), alternately produced by BR and SWF, and *Monitor* (FDP), produced by WDR. On West German television, the political differences between programmes are much sharper than they are on British television. In adopting this practice, however, the ARD network made a significant shift. Political differences were mapped on to regional differences. The right-wing programmes come from the predominantly right-wing *Länder* of Bavaria (BR), Baden-Württemberg and the Rhineland and Palatinate (SWF), while the left-wing programmes come from the traditionally left-wing *Länder* of North Rhine-Westphalia (WDR), Hamburg and Lower Saxony (NDR). Political differences within each *Land* or between individual *Länder* jointly responsible for one broadcasting institution were ignored, and as a result the practice of pluralism within each institution tended to decline.

In 1972, the CSU majority in Bavaria attempted to increase the 'responsiveness' of BR to the dominant political tendency in the Bavarian parliament, by increasing the number of political representatives on the *Rundfunkrat*, by extending the control of the *Rundfunkrat* over appointments and into direct control of programming (hitherto the prerogative of the *Intendant*), and by moves towards legalising commercial broadcasting. This measure reached the

## ACCOUNTABILITY

All the *Länder* adopted basically the same three-tier structure of accountability to the various *Land* parliaments. This involved each station having an *Intendant* or director-general, who was appointed by a *Rundfunkrat*, or broadcasting council, with a smaller committee, the *Verwaltungsrat*, which had a closer and more regular contact with the *Intendant* on financial and administrative matters. The balance of powers between these three levels and their links with the public vary according to the station concerned. In general,

however, the *Rundfunkrat* is understood as being the representative of the community in the field of broadcasting and is under an obligation to speak for the overall interests of broadcasting and the public. The *Verwaltungsrat* fulfils no representative functions and its main duty lies in supervising the business and administrative functions of the *Intendant*.

There are two basic structures of the *Verwaltungsrat* and the *Rundfunkrat*. One, principally adopted in the broadcasting institutions which started life in the French and American zones, has a substantial number of representa-

tives of non-political social groups such as the churches, youth groups, universities and sports organisations on the *Rundfunkrat* and a limited number (in some cases none at all) of politicians on the *Verwaltungsrat*. The other basic model, principally adopted for Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) and NDR, which both came from NWDR, provides simply for a limitation on the number of politicians who may be members of the *Rundfunkrat*, and leaves the election of members to the respective *Land* parliaments. Members of the *Verwaltungsrat* either have no limitation placed on them (WDR) or up to half can be politicians (NDR).



statute book and a *Rundfunkrat* convened under the new law met in May 1972. But pressure from the SPD, which appealed to the Bavarian Constitutional Court, a *Bürgerinitiative* by a citizens' group to safeguard the freedom of broadcasting, and the opposition of the Bavarian Senate, reversed the decision of the *Land* parliament and preserved the principles of public as opposed to political accountability, and of non-commercial broadcasting and pluralism.

The second principle of public service broadcasting as specified by the Constitutional Court, that 'all relevant forces have an influence in the organs of control and a fair hearing in the overall programme', although built into the structures of public accountability of the various ARD stations, did not necessarily extend to the programmes produced by those stations. In an attempt to rectify this, the *Proporz* system was developed. To many West German journalists and broadcasters this is one of the least satisfactory aspects of political balance. *Proporz* provides that there should be a balance in senior posts between SPD and CDU/CSU functionaries and many appointments are made on this criterion. If an *Intendant* is CDU, then his deputy must be SPD; if a director of programmes is SPD, then he or she should be balanced by a CDU chief editor, and so on. *Proporz* tends to reduce the principles of pluralism to a narrow range bounded and polarised by the two dominant political axes in the Federal Republic and West Berlin. To know that an NDR, WDR or HR programme comes from an SPD-inclined station and BR or SDR programmes come from the CDU/CSU is excellent; to have senior staff appointments and considerations of programme policy largely determined by party political criteria is less desirable.

The 1961 Constitutional Court judgment made it clear that balance applied as much to entertainment as to information programmes.

'Broadcasting is more than a "medium" for the forming of public opinion, it is an eminent "factor" in the formation of public opinion. Its contribution to the formation of public opinion is in no way limited to news broadcasts, political commentaries, series on past, present and future political problems; radio plays, musical presentations, the transmission of satirical and cabaret programmes, even programme settings help to form opinion. Every programme will have a certain tendency because of the selection and the form of the individual transmission, particularly where a decision is involved on what is not to be broadcast, what need not interest the audience without detriment to the formation of public opinion, and on how what is to be broadcast is to be shaped and enunciated.' (Williams, p.30)

The extension of the concept of balance to satirical and cabaret programmes and even to fiction programmes raised for West German TV executives the question of the relation of entertainment and ideology. How far should, or could, the cosy, individualistic and frequently romantic assumptions on which family series and most imported films were

based be challenged by alternative programmes? The problem was particularly pertinent in WDR and NDR, the two largest stations in the ARD network, contributing respectively 25 per cent and 20 per cent of the network's programmes and with the finance to make a great many original television dramas and films—the most expensive programme forms.

Klaus von Bismarck, the *Intendant* of WDR between 1961 and 1976, argued in *Die Zeit* (4 February 1966) that public service broadcasters should always fight on behalf of the individual against the collective forces in society and particularly against the political parties. Von Bismarck draws on the work of Karl Jaspers, the Swiss libertarian and existentialist philosopher, for his arguments on the right of the individual to make known his or her views, and for his belief that the worthwhile values of a society cannot be destroyed by criticism. His philosophy of the right to self-expression fits closely with the notion of the individual creative artist or 'Autor' that dominated the thinking of young German film-makers after the Oberhausen manifesto of 1962. Organisations like NDR and WDR had, therefore, the will and the cash to finance young 'Autoren' and to produce plays and films that went outside the conventional practices of the international film and television industries.

### The Arbeiterfilm

One of the most striking instances of the development of a programme genre unlikely to be fostered by a commercial system is that of the *Arbeiterfilm* developed by WDR, the Cologne station. The *Arbeiterfilm* ('worker film') was the creation of the drama department of WDR working under Dr Günter Rohrbach and the head of the culture department, Dr Hans-Geert Falkenberg, who responded to the initiatives of a number of predominantly Berlin-based film-makers to develop a genre of realist cinema concerned to put the lives of the German working class on the screen. The best known—in Britain at least—of the *Arbeiterfilme* is Fassbinder's 5-part TV series *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag* (Eight Hours are not a Day).

*Acht Stunden*, transmitted between November 1972 and March 1973, was very popular with audiences, achieving an audience share of between 41 and 65 per cent of which, according to the Infotest rating system, between 56 and 69 per cent found the programmes 'good' or 'very good'. Not surprisingly, perhaps, since they were very similar in form and structure to traditional television family series. In one respect, however, this series was different, in that its message of populist self-management at the workplace threw into question the social relations of capitalist production—a model which is assumed unproblematically by most television series.

Despite the requirement of the Constitutional Court for balance in entertainment as well as informational programming, the series came under close and hostile scrutiny by the WDR *Rundfunkrat*. Committed to a narrative line designed to promote audience identification, *Acht Stunden* bypassed many



The Arbeiterfilm. Above: 'Familienglück'.



Below: Meryl Streep in 'Holocaust'.







Below: Fassbinder's 'Acht Stunden'.



of the intricacies of wage bargaining and shop floor negotiations which figure in the Federal Republic's industrial scene. The series offended the representatives of the employers and the trades unions on the *Rundfunkrat*, which demanded that in the final three episodes there should be a clear exposition of the real roles of the various employer, employee and trade union bodies involved in industrial relations, and that this should include a clear expression of the arguments of employers and employees—of capital and labour. The three final episodes were never made.

The *Rundfunkrat*'s decision about *Acht Stunden* implied the adoption of criteria of objective representation of the real world, for a series avowedly based on the traditional TV series where generally no such criteria apply. Few police series would be made if the statistical profile of the crimes represented in a series (and the clear-up rates) corresponded to the statistical profile of crimes committed.

But *Acht Stunden* is unrepresentative both of Fassbinder and of the *Arbeiterfilm*. More characteristic of the genre, and excellent by any standards, are the *Arbeiterfilme* of Christian Ziewer—*Liebe Mutter mir geht es gut* (Dear Mother, I'm O.K., 1971); *Schneeglöckchen blühen im September* (Snowdrops Bloom in September, 1974); *Der Aufrechte Gang* (Walking Tall, 1976)—and of Marianne Lüdcke and Ingo Krastische—*Die Wollands* (The Wolland Family, 1972); *Lohn und Liebe* (Wages and Love, 1973); *Familienglück* (Wedded Bliss, 1975). These films attempt to revive the tradition of German proletarian cinema in the Weimar Republic (films like *Kuhle Wampe*, *Brüder* and *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*), by drawing on Brecht's injunction to take the medium of the masses seriously and devising a style of representation which is popular, realistic and instructive. The most recent and perhaps final echo of the genre is the NDR/WDF co-production *Emden geht nach USA* (Emden goes to the USA, 1976), Gisela Tuchtenhagen and Klaus Wildenhahn's account of the closure of the Emden Volkswagen works following the decision to produce the vw Golf/Rabbit for the American market in the USA.

A number of other controversial subject areas have been opened up by public service television in West Germany. In 1974–75, the WDR drama inputs to the ARD and the network's own third channel Westdeutsches Fernsehen (WDF) featured six plays concerned with sexual politics under the general title *Frauen 74*. These were *Anna* by Uschi Reich; *Marianne findet ihr Glück* (Marianne Finds Happiness) by Hannelore Klar; *Mira* by Jens Heilmeyer and Francisco Alcalá-Toca; *Kampf um ein Kind* (Fight over a Child) by Ingemo Engström; *Zwei Schwestern* (Two Sisters) by Harun Farocki; and *Monolog eines Stars* (Monologue of a Star) by Rosa von Praunheim. A number of other single plays, films and documentaries could be mentioned as examples of programming concerned with groups and lives which are usually submerged from view or represented as subordinate. These projects indicate the positive commitment of West German

broadcasting to imperatives other than those of profit maximisation.

To be sure, this innovatory tendency is distributed unevenly across the ARD network: WDR's drama about homosexuality *Die Konsequenz* (1977) was, for example, not transmitted by Bayerischer Rundfunk. There is a politics in TV programming and the definition of the limits of acceptability and pluralism, and the attempt of the WDR drama department to represent the working class has effectively been abandoned because of a campaign orchestrated by the right-wing CDU/CSU. The *Rotfunk* ('red broadcasting') campaign was started in Autumn 1974 as a lead in to the 1975 Land parliament elections in North Rhine-Westphalia. The CDU's leading campaigner was Heinrich Windelin, chairman of the North Rhine-Westphalia CDU and a member of the *Verwaltungsrat* of WDR. 'We do not intend to stand for this broadcasting any more,' he said, promising that if the CDU were elected there would be 'changes in WDR'. The CDU were not elected, and Klaus von Bismarck remained as *Intendant* of WDR. But not for long: when his term of office came up for renewal in 1976, von Bismarck, one of the major figures in post-war German broadcasting, was passed over.

## Holocaust

West German broadcasting's most celebrated act of programme scheduling took place in January 1979, when the four episodes of the American series *Holocaust* were transmitted by WDR, the biggest and most left-inclined of the ARD stations. The programmes were networked in West Germany and West Berlin in a highly unusual linking of the five 'third' channels, which usually carry quite separate programmes. Opposition to networking *Holocaust* came from Bayerischer Rundfunk, which was also reluctant to transmit the discussion and phone-in programme, organised by WDR from Cologne, that followed each episode. According to the leader of the ruling party in Bavaria, the CSU's Franz-Josef Strauss, the economic achievements of Germany meant that Germans had no need to be reminded of Auschwitz.

*Holocaust* had a large audience, which grew with each episode. The screenings generated an enormous amount of discussion about the Nazi era, the fate of the Jews and other victims of Nazi extermination policies; and a response in the German and international press which, while often critical of the series and its account of history, praised WDR and the public service broadcasting system for screening it and for trying to direct public attention to the issues it raised. Between the first and the last episodes, *Holocaust*'s Infratest audience rating grew from 32 per cent to 41 per cent.

This was by no means the first programme screened on German TV about the concentration camps of the Third Reich, and it was deliberately pre-echoed by documentaries on the camps and followed by repeats of other dramas, including *Ein Tag* (A Day), first transmitted by NDR in 1965 as a report from a camp. *Ein Tag* was directed and partly scripted by Egon Monk, who also directed the NDR



production of Fallada's *Bauern Bomben und Bonzen* (shown in 1979 by the BBC as *Peasants, Politics and Power*), which won the 'Fernsehspiel des Monats' prize in May 1973. One of the two of Brecht's principal assistants who now live in West Germany, Monk referred in his speech of acceptance for the award of a TV drama prize to *Ein Tag* in 1966 to the fact that a French film on the camps, *L'Enclos*, had been unable to find a German commercial distributor. It is hard to imagine any German commercial TV system screening *Holocaust* or the other programmes on the Nazi period. But the history of WDR's initiative in acquiring and screening *Holocaust* surely demonstrates the importance of the series to German audiences. The screenings are powerful testimony to the ability of the West German public broadcasting system to serve its audience in ways that a commercial system is unlikely to do.

### Broadcasting and Public Opinion

Much of this imaginative programme production has upset the politicians in the Federal Republic, particularly those in the CSU and the CDU, who found it hard to tolerate programmes which challenged the capitalist and individualist principles on which the social market economy has been built. Although these programmes were a minority, infrequently interspersed between a diet of old Hollywood films, TV series and current affairs programmes which did not stray far from the policies of the main political parties, they did disturb the homogenised, consensus world-view offered by most other programmes. To curtail them, it was necessary for public opinion to be orchestrated against what they represented.

Although the Constitutional Court had recognised that broadcasting was more than a 'medium' for the forming of public opinion, the right-wing critics of public service broadcasting sought to use private enterprise organs purporting to represent public opinion in order to justify their case for tighter ideological and political control. What was unacceptable were those areas of production which showed up the limited and partial nature of private sector reportage and film production.

The screening of WDR's *Rote Fahnen* (*Red Flags can be seen*

Better) on the ARD network in December 1971 gives a good idea of the way in which the press was used in this strategy. The film, a feature-length documentary on the closure of the Phrix works in Krefeld (a subsidiary of Dow Chemicals) seen from the point of view of those who were made redundant, had been screened a few months earlier on WDR's third channel as part of what the right called its 'Red Week'. It had occasioned little comment. This time, however, the employers' lobby was ready, and two long hostile articles appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. One, in the paper's economics section, accused the film's makers, Theo Gallehr and Rolf Schübel, of suppressing evidence favourable to the employers and of paying the sacked employees for their participation in a film which purported to be a documentary.

A second article, in the television section of the paper, dismissed the film as being neither a proper documentary nor a feature film but a boring and repetitious attack on capitalism. Some two months later, after the film had been awarded the Adolf Grimme prize, the *FAZ* returned to the attack, repeating the accusations of tendentiousness and of depicting the employers at Phrix as wicked 19th century capitalists. The paper also claimed that the film's makers had omitted a number of 'facts' which did not support their case—that all the workers made redundant had found new jobs, that they had received financial compensation, that the workers were not evicted from their houses and almost all were given the option of buying them, and that all workers were given the option of remaining in the works pension fund.

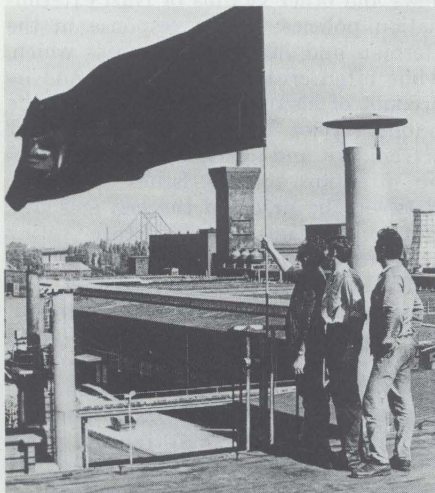
Gallehr, Schübel and WDR counter-attacked. They accused the *FAZ* in turn of insufficient scrupulousness in ascertaining the facts. No one on the paper had actually spoken to anyone involved in the film's production—either the film-makers or the sacked Phrix workers; the unemployment figures quoted by the *FAZ* were wrong; the Phrix management representatives interviewed in the film had vetted their own contributions, etc. *Rote Fahnen* was admittedly tendentious in its approach (the Constitutional Court judgment thought this applied to all programmes), but its statements were substantially true and the film was a fitting one for transmission by a public service broadcasting institution. This latter point was emphasised by Klaus von Bismarck and WDR when the film was shown for a third time on the third channel in March 1972.

The choice of the *FAZ* as a site for the attack on WDR and *Rote Fahnen* is significant. The *FAZ* is one of the Federal Republic's most important newspapers, drawing over 10 per cent of its readership from outside West Germany. It has a substantial readership in the business and financial worlds, and it claims that 90 per cent of its readers are important decision-makers in the West German economy. Although nominally a paper in the middle of the political spectrum, its apparent neutrality masks a determined advocacy of capitalism. The paper could anticipate speaking to decision-makers,



particularly those in North Rhine-Westphalia, with an apparent authority and objectivity. But in this case its traditionally scrupulous standards of reporting were not maintained: it offered a partial account of the Phrix sackings which depended heavily, if not exclusively, on the views of the management. The role of press comment as the voice of public opinion in the Federal Republic was thus shown to be biased.

The other major agency of public opinion, elected politicians, was also active in ventriloquism. The right established an organisation known as 'TeleControl' to monitor all TV broadcasts, particularly those of the leftish stations (NDR, WDR, Hessischer Rundfunk and Radio Bremen), and which provided its supporters, many of them CDU and CSU politicians, with detailed information about 'subversive' programmes. TeleControl was the brainchild of a CSU Bundestag deputy, Carl-Dietrich Spranger, and aimed to supply details of any example of 'tendencies hostile to business in the broadcasting institutions' and to comment on anything which 'falsifies and defames our public and social economy; agitation against the social market economy and its bases; leftist church politics; pro-communist reports from abroad; feminism, sexuality and pornography as cultural centres in broadcasting and television.' As a result of TeleControl's activities, every word and image in broadcasting is carefully checked before transmission. Caution rather than liberty is now the watchword of the day.



'Rote Fahnen': true or tendentious?





## The CDU versus NDR

The attack on NDR by *Minister-Präsidenten* Ernst Albrecht and Gerhard Stoltenberg must therefore be seen as part of a long-term strategy deployed by the CDU and the CSU against the concept of public service broadcasting as it was established in the British zone at the end of the war. The basic strategy is to attempt to fragment a national broadcasting structure on the grounds of regional pluralism. Deprived of the economies of scale, the smaller regional stations are more expensive to run and therefore ripe for handing over to commercial enterprise. It was the CDU administration of Karl Arnold in North Rhine-Westphalia which seceded from the centre-left NWDR in 1955 to form WDR and to leave NDR as a broadcasting organisation serving the public of three *Länder*—Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg. It is again the CDU who now want to break up NDR.

What has upset the CDU is that although they have political control in Lower Saxony and in Schleswig-Holstein, which provide six of the eight members of the NDR *Verwaltungsrat*, because of the provisions of the inter-Land treaty they do not have an overall majority on it. Nor, perhaps more importantly, are they able to control NDR's programming policy. Sitting under the chairmanship of the CDU Minister of Culture for Lower Saxony, the NDR *Verwaltungsrat* ruled in April 1977 that NDR's report on the proposed nuclear power station at

Brokdorf and its transmission on its third programme, together with the transmission, by RB, SFB and WDR, of the 13-part series *Der Betriebsrat* (The Works Council), which the German Employers association considered too leftish, were contrary to the NDR constitution. Incensed by this attempt to interfere in programming policy, the NDR *Intendant*, Martin Neuffer (SPD), appealed to the Hamburg Administrative Court that the ruling of the *Verwaltungsrat* was *ultra vires*. Neuffer won his appeal. In June 1977, after the CDU members of the *Verwaltungsrat* had deliberately made it inoperative by staying away, the NDR *Rundfunkrat* adopted a resolution calling on them to resign.

What Albrecht and Stoltenberg want is what the Bavarian CSU wanted in 1972, a broadcasting institution which is more 'responsive' to the politicians. To be sure, there have been problems in the way that NDR has conducted its affairs. The financial relations between NDR and Studio Hamburg, which is wholly owned by Norddeutsches Werbefernsehen, an advertising subsidiary jointly owned with Radio Bremen (NDR, 92.6 per cent; RB, 7.4 per cent), have been somewhat problematic in the past, although matters have now been straightened out. In addition, it is generally acknowledged that although it is responsible for broadcasting to the publics of the three *Länder*, the affairs and interests of the Hamburg programme staff take precedence over those in Hanover and Kiel, whatever the

political complexion of the various *Land* governments.

Fortunately, however, it is far from clear whether Albrecht and Stoltenberg will have their way. Albrecht's decision not to renew the inter-Land treaty has been challenged in the Federal Administrative Court in West Berlin on the ground that the decision was taken by Albrecht and not the *Land* parliament of Lower Saxony. And even if the CDU win there, the NDR studio and transmission facilities are in Hamburg and they will need the permission of the Hamburg authorities to use them. Finally, of course, there could be an appeal to the Constitutional Court that the new stations in Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein do not fulfil the requirements of the Court's Judgment of 1961.

All broadcasting systems are sites of political conflict, and political interests always seek to exercise control over broadcasting. How could so powerful a force for social cohesion and the principal source of information not be political? The form of devolved responsibility, public accountability and pluralistic control of broadcasting established in Germany after the war, with the injunction to serve a variety of publics, is now threatened. However stormy the relations between politicians and broadcasters have been in Germany, the model is clearly different and superior to that of Britain. Germany has a broadcasting order that has the signal merit of being accountable to the publics it serves, which focuses and represents a variety of interests in the community, and which constitutes balance not by broadcasters intervening between interests and ideologies, and packaging them neutrally, but by transmitting partisan programmes that are perceived as such by their audiences. The fights by political interests in and over German broadcasting are public and explicit, in contrast to the situation in Britain where such pressures are anything but public.

The conflict between public service and commercial media interests in Germany has become overdetermined by party political conflicts, in broadcasting and in the introduction of new media technologies. The attempt made by the SPD in Hesse to establish cable television in Kassel was blocked by the CDU and by press interests. The introduction of Videotext is vexed by conflicts between the public service broadcasting organisations and press interests, each of whom claim they should operate the new system.

What conclusions may be drawn from the theoretical arguments is open to debate. What can be pointed to with certainty, however, is the Federal Republic's record of public service broadcasting in fostering the expression of a range of opinion and the development of new and often exceptionally interesting programmes. ■

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# CINEMA VERSUS

BY MICHAEL JACKSON

The battle between the cinema and television industries for the eyes and ears of the mass public in Britain was lost in the middle 50s. Yet twenty-five years later, many of the attitudes and prejudices held by each business about the other are still informed by the events of that time. Ironically, it will soon be broadcast television's turn to fight a similar battle against new distribution technologies, but this time it is by no means certain that it will be on the 'winning' side.

The cinema of the 1930s was a world away from today's multi-cinema complexes. The addition of sound had given cinemas the edge over radio and cured a worrying box-office slump. Prices were low; the average ticket price in 1938 was 10d; even by 1952, when the price had doubled, it was still only the equivalent of ten cigarettes or a pint and a half of beer. Wages were low too, and most cinemas remained open almost twelve hours a day, which combined with their neighbourhood position, added convenience to the comfort of the many new cinemas. But above all, the depression of the 30s prevented the mass working class audience from looking elsewhere for entertainment, and the war consolidated the cinema's appeal. By 1946 an average 31.4m tickets were sold a week, a figure which has been estimated as the largest per capita in the world.

Broadly the attitude of the industry to television was that they should control it and, failing that, they should fight it. The Cinema Exhibitors Association

(CEA), representing the exhibitors, always opposed television. The renters (KRS) and the CEA had jointly banned sales to television when a meeting in July 1935 recorded that television 'might be regarded as a serious menace.' (BBC television began in 1936.) A US Department of Commerce report recorded that television gave exhibitors 'the jitters ... (they) had worked themselves into a regular breakdown at the prospect of television.' The Baird Company thought it necessary to send its technical director to address worried exhibitors. He stressed the benefits of large screen television in cinemas; the exhibitors need have 'no fear as regards reducing box-office receipts.' The Department of Commerce report, however, thought that 'any regular programme service of more than a few minutes duration would have to rely on motion pictures.' For reasons of cost, television would have to secure its film from the 'regular supply', i.e. feature film production. Herein lay the dilemma for exhibitors: whereas producers and distributors could theoretically supply television with their product, cinemas were tied to the mass audience.

Some cinemas did try to develop a new audience out of the novelty of large-screen television. In March 1939 three cinemas in the West End of London were filled at a guinea a seat for a boxing match. 'Promoters,' said the trade paper *The Cinema*, 'obviously see a big royalty prospect in the cinema field.' The BBC's Phillip Dorte agreed to the 'rediffusion' but commented '... I am sorry to say that at the moment I am not aware of the film business letting us have any films.' Indeed Gerald Cock, head of television, was 'referred back to British companies' after trying to purchase features in America. The KRS refused to supply

newsreels and in March 1939 the CEA set up a Watch Committee.

Obviously it was a Mickey Mouse cartoon, one of the few cinema attractions to escape the general ban, which was abruptly cut off on 1 September 1939 as television closed down for the war. But it was not forgotten. Before Lord Hankey's wartime committee on the future of television, J. Arthur Rank pressed for 'spheres of influence' to be decided between the two industries akin to those 'with newspapers concerning the broadcasting of news' (these 'agreements' had fixed both the timing and amount of radio news and had held up the BBC's progress in this field until the impetus of war). Rank envisaged a cinema industry with its own television studios; he also noted that 'there was a certain residual value in films which was never fully exploited.' Hankey predictably reported that the two industries should work together; cinemas should be licensed to play television but transmission should be left to the BBC. A conclusion also reached by Beveridge in 1950: 'The whole experience of broadcasting has shown its power properly used to help other entertainments rather than impoverish them.'

In 1950 cinema still had pride of place, with £105m paid at the box-office, twice as much as on all other forms of public entertainment combined. None the less, in 1949 the CEA had been told that cinemas were losing £600,000 a year because of television and that this figure would be £6m in three years time. There were already 150,000 television licences, a figure increasing at the rate of 10,000 a month. A 1950 questionnaire answered by a huge 24,000 viewers revealed that 'on an average only one evening was left





# TELEVISION

free each week for other interests', the most popular item being the newsreel (begun in 1948). Two years earlier another BBC survey had found that 'the quantity of viewing seemed much more closely related to programme content than the quantity of listening.' Not surprisingly, therefore, the BBC by 1951 was becoming more confident in its dealings with the film industry. George Barnes, director of television, recorded after a cinema-TV dinner that 'the strength of the BBC's position was obvious.'

To combat any desire for the BBC to test its strength in the market-place, the CEA passed its 'Llandudno Resolution' in July 1952. Moved by Granada's Cecil Bernstein, it stated baldly that: 'Your committee recommends to the General Council to advise members to discontinue trading with any renter or producer making or handling entertainment films for both television and cinema exhibition ... a producer or renter cannot be prevented from deciding which of these two markets he desires to serve, but it cannot be both.' This move was designed to end inconveniences such as the 'hundreds of cancellations' which had followed the 1950 broadcast of *Pack Up Your Troubles*, a Laurel and Hardy film. It marked the point at which the film industry recognised the advent of television as a dangerous force in the market-place and looked towards the possibility of their 'own' product being shown against them.

Film production for TV had already begun by 1952 when Douglas Fairbanks Jr. began shooting a series of programmes for American TV, but there was 'no question of them being offered to the BBC.' British viewers had to wait for the greater spending power of ITV. (As early as 1945, Andrew Stone had announced

the production of *Petticoat Lane*, to be shot in both 35mm and 16mm; the latter would 'photograph close-ups of every scene, long shots and medium shots being considered unsuitable for ... the small screen.')

Another field of controversy concerned televised clips of current cinema attractions, it being CEA policy in 1950 that clips adversely affected the commercial life of a film. The BBC reversed this policy until by 1952 Norman Collins was 'expected to tell the film industry that if *Current Release* is to be continued, the Corporation would want one high quality feature film a month,' for which it would pay £1,000. *Current Release* was rested a month later. And antagonism continued over the BBC's treatment of films. In 1956 Scottish exhibitors wrote complaining after a 'Children's Hour' spokesman had recommended youngsters to go to the cinema 'just once in a while where there is something really good on.' What the exhibitors were really complaining about was the increased selectivity of the mass audience in the television age. (As late as 1974, United Artists refused to supply clips to the BBC after an unfavourable review of the film *Juggernaut*.)

The trade paper *Kine Weekly* held a forum on the cinema/TV relationship in December 1953. Against the general mood, it was headed 'Film Industry must work with TV'. Participants included Norman Collins (ex-BBC and a director of a commercial TV pressure group), Cecil Bernstein (Granada Theatres), Dennis Walls (past president of the CEA) and C. V. Brown (exhibitor), and some of their opinions are worth recording:

CECIL BERNSTEIN: 'We can work with the BBC so long as the BBC does not expect us to give it the films we sell ... We believe there is a future for the live

TV show in Kinemas. For example, the Oliviers in *Antony and Cleopatra* ... As far as Granada is concerned, we are in the entertainment business ... We say: "Why should we not also supply TV shows?"'

DENNIS WALLS: 'We should not be a part of giving the public free entertainment. It is a bad principle.'

NORMAN COLLINS: 'Television ... could be used by the film industry to sell the idea of going to the Kinema ... With the coming of VHF in a few years time it will be possible to operate 96 TV stations ... Why (should) not (exhibitors) own and operate the local stations?'

C. V. BROWN: 'Public houses still exist in spite of off licences at every street corner.'

In July 1953 a joint BBC/film industry meeting was held to discuss 'safeguards' in the event of private enterprise TV; it was in 1953 that the Tory government's White Paper on commercial television was issued. Both Granada and (with some trepidation) ABPC later became contractors; both had been initially opposed to ITV. (ABPC had lent a PR man to the anti-ITV National Television Lobby and Granada's adviser on publicity, Sir Leslie Plummer MP, had spoken against it in the House.) By 1959, two-thirds of ABPC's profits came from television. Rank, itself initially sceptical, later joined another reluctant party, Associated Newspapers, to form Southern Television, which was less profitable as it lacked networking status.

*Kine Weekly* was confident, at least to begin with, about the new competition: 'From the composition of the board (of the ITA), film men will deduce that the type of queue-forming entertainment



that would harm the Kinema box-office is hardly likely to obsess the new set up.' To compete, the cinema division of ABPC launched a 'Big Picture Parade' promotion campaign seventeen days before Rediffusion opened in London on 22 September 1955. In July 1956 both Fox and Rank booked 'spots' in *I Love Lucy* (at a cost of £3,000) to promote current attractions. But how would the increased strength of television be reflected in the market-place?

The CEA's Annual Report of 1955 had noted that some sections of the trade favoured the 'handing over of films to television on the basis of experiment as to the effect'; and this desire for control was no doubt hastened by the television companies' purchase of film from non-industry sources, such as Vernon Burn's Television Programme Distributors, who supplied titles such as *They Made Me a Fugitive* and the Fernandel comedy *Ignace*. A plan was proposed whereby the BBC would select 12 films out of a pool of 20, at a cost of £2,000 per film, supplied by British Film Producers Association members. (The CEA dropped out of the talks at an early stage.) In return, the BBC would no longer purchase films from non-industry sources. The BBC accepted the deal but it was never consummated, the rewards for both sides being too small. There were additional worries for the CEA, with large packages of pre-1948 films being sold to non-industry sources. In August 1956, 750 Warner films changed hands for the second time (for \$21m) when PRM bought AAP, a TV syndicator. It was understood that the films could not be shown abroad without Warner Brothers' approval and pressure was put on the Motion Picture Association of America to ensure this. (However, films still leaked through: in the second quarter of 1957 *Kine Weekly* estimated 39 films shown on television, seven of them on BBC, of which 30 were British, eight American and one French.)

There was bitterness among some sections of the industry that some of its senior members had gone into television and that, to add insult to injury, they played films on their stations, especially after statements had been made as late as 1955 such as the following from Granada's chief film booker: 'I reiterate our view that neither the BBC nor commercial programme companies should show on television films intended for Kinema audiences.' Cecil Bernstein's justification was simple and often quoted: 'He always said that he had two hats. As a cinema owner he would keep films off TV. As a TV mogul he had his duties to shareholders.'

Perhaps surprisingly, it was Bernstein who was to suggest a plan to ease his temptations 'as a TV mogul'. The background for the 'Bernstein Plan' was stark. By 1960 cinema admissions would be 52 per cent of their 1939 level, 31.5 per cent of their peak 1945 level and 36.9 per cent of the 1950 figure. The immediate background was several deals for the sale of large packages of films to TV. In May 1957 it was announced that ABC were to play 25 Korda films (Korda had

earlier sold the American premiere of *Richard III* to NBC for \$500,000). But the two most important deals were the BBC's purchase of a hundred RKO films from Robin International of New York at a reported cost of £215,000, and a proposed plan of Michael Balcon's to sell 90-100 Ealing films, which had led exhibitors to threaten him with a boycott of his future productions.

At first the CEA proposed a 'positive approach' by which renters would make stipulations regarding the timing of films on TV; the Federation of British Film

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**'Why should people  
go out and see bad  
pictures when they  
can stay at home and  
see them for nothing?'**

**Sam Goldwyn, 1955**

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Makers wanted payments based in relation to the audience rating since 'films are in effect being used to subsidise television.' The general mood, however, was against any such treating with television. The CEA president in January 1958: 'We feel the key to the situation is to control the supply of British films to television.' Not everyone, however, was immediately convinced. Reported *Today's Cinema*: 'One exhibitor when he read that the scheme emanated from a TV source and was supported by the major circuits wondered where the catch was.'

**T**he Film Industry Defence Organisation (FIDO) began operations on 31 August 1958. Equally represented on its board were producers, renters and exhibitors. Among the original members were John Davis (Rank), Jack Goodlatte (ABPC), Cecil Bernstein (Granada) and Mike Frankovich (Columbia). The main proponents, however, were those who had most to lose—the exhibitors. And their power came from their ability to exclude from their cinemas the work of dissenting producers.

FIDO was to act in respect of the British (and Eire) rights of films which 'would otherwise be offered to television', provided it was satisfied that their showing would be 'injurious' to its members and that ten years had elapsed since the films' registration (an exceptional circumstances clause was inserted so that rights for films younger than ten years could be obtained if necessary). Price levels operating at the time would apply. A 'statement of intent' from Rank and ABPC was obtained whereby they would not press FIDO to acquire their backlogs of films. (A 'pre-emptive' right was obtained for 'toll-television'—pay TV.) The teeth of FIDO lay in the power of the

KRS and the CEA to 'refuse to book films ... directly or indirectly ... made available to ... television.' (Later, because the American members of the KRS ran into anti-trust difficulties, the CEA alone acted on this clause.) Thus FIDO was to buy films, at first, from independent British producers, the combines holding back for the good of the industry and the KRS ensuring that its American members held back their films. A clause was placed in all KRS contracts calling for one farthing per paid admission. (Certain performances, and cinemas with a weekly box-office take under £200, were excluded.) Not all cinema owners were convinced, however. Sir Fred Emery, who had his own Manchester circuit, wanted a committee to select loss-making films which should go to TV: 'If they got the same reception as they did at the cinemas, the situation would sort itself out.'

In its first 32 weeks FIDO claimed to have collected £295,900, an average of £9,112 a week; total expenditure in this period was £27,321. (Only one non-cooperating exhibitor was left.) Without FIDO, it was claimed, there would be 15 films a week on television. None the less, one of FIDO's first moves was to except the inevitable and sanction the Ealing deal with ABC. 95 films were to be shown, but they were not to be networked and would go out on Sunday afternoons.

In November 1959 the CEA recommended its members not to book David Selznick's films after his sale of 22 films to the BBC. There was also talk of blacklisting Stanley Kramer after three of his films reached the TV screen, although they had in fact changed hands long before. The writer of one of them, *High Noon*, was Carl Foreman, a victim of a different blacklist; he wrote to *Today's Cinema* to say that 'such blacklists are only temporarily successful and that the victory, if any, of the blacklists is a pyrrhic one.'

None the less, a storm broke out when it was announced that the producer John Woolf had sold his company, Independent Film Distributors, to Associated Rediffusion at a reported price of £250,000. AR's reason for buying was the 55 films produced by Woolf and another independent, Daniel Angel. Woolf claimed that FIDO had merely asked him to hold back for the good of the industry; FIDO, for their part, claimed that they had not been offered first refusal. Among the films was *The African Queen*—the box-office strength of which was testament to John Woolf's power in the industry. But apart from the hard cash, the real reason for the sale appears to have been that Woolf and Angel were philosophically opposed to what they considered to be FIDO's 'bribe'. Much rancour was caused by their action, but Angel for one was unrepentant: 'If they want to sell cinemas they don't ask the producer ... for permission ... I have only done what any prudent businessman would do ... there should not be one law for producers and one for cinema companies with TV interests.'

A boycott was recommended in January 1960, but partly because of legal



difficulties it was lifted in March 1961. Perhaps in response to Angel's criticisms, FIDO secured an undertaking from Granada and ABC not to acquire any further films for television except those that came from the network. Responding to the pressure of events, AR decided to split the IFD films into two parts; the BBC was invited to choose one part and later they were exchanged. One of the BBC's films, incidentally, was *I Am a Camera*, which became the first 'x' film to play British TV; predictably, questions were asked in the House.

Although FIDO survived this test by two British producers, it was to have greater problems with the American companies. Doubts about FIDO were made public by the president of Universal, Milton R. Rackmil, in August 1963. 'I will wake up one morning and say "this is the day".' If a ban were imposed he believed that Universal 'could earn as much from television.' There was also opposition within the CEA, on the grounds that 'to prolong (the) life of ... indifferent pictures, that don't amount to real opposition, is absurd and outdated.' The majority view remained that 'FIDO has been the envy of the world.' But, 'envy' or not, the dam was beginning to burst: MCA was negotiating with the BBC over some of the 700 pre-1948 Paramount films which it had agreed 'verbally' not to sell to British television; and Lew Grade bought 50 Goldwyn pictures for a reported £500,000. Even though he had virtually gone out of business as an active producer, Goldwyn was immediately blacklisted, and he in turn announced that he would sue the CEA.

The action never reached court, because in September 1964 the CEA announced that the 'attitude of the public to television had changed' and that in place of a total ban a five-year bar would be imposed on the TV screening of films. FIDO stopped buying at the end of January 1965. It had bought more than a thousand covenants at a cost of around £2m, at prices ranging from a few hundred pounds to £10,000 a title. Rights had been bought usually for ten years, but some were held in perpetuity. Later allegations were made that some films were bought at inflated prices and that in a few cases covenants were bought for films for which the negative no longer existed. Among these latter films are said to have been some of the 'quota quickies' produced in the 30s at Warners' Teddington Studios.

But why did FIDO die? The main reason was the hunger of the American companies for the large dollops of ready cash that British television could offer. Especially significant was the BBC's desire to break the trade bar on feature films in order to create a supply of programming for BBC-2. The BBC offered MCA, who were keen to find a way of selling the Paramount backlog, a deal which was large enough to persuade them to disregard any threat from British exhibitors. And as FIDO ended, a huge number of films began changing hands between the distributors and the television companies, one Fox executive

being quoted as saying that 9,000 features were on offer to British television. ATV paid a mere £5,000 a piece for 75 United Artists films, said to be one of the first hand-picked deals: titles included *The Misfits*, then only four years old. (British films, however, generally got better prices as they were outside the companies' 14 per cent non-British quota.) The sudden end of FIDO provoked a desperate rush to the market-place, which created a buyers' market for almost ten years afterwards.

**I**n the final analysis, FIDO died because it had outlived its usefulness. Even without large numbers of films, television still eroded the cinemas' audiences and cinemas still closed. FIDO had not made the menace of television disappear; and to illustrate the point, FIDO was rapidly losing its purchasing power precisely because of the fall in the number of cinema admissions. It had, though, for a brief period, brought the industry together, and in any case the reaction against a new competitor was instinctive. Even the Church had successfully demanded a 'closed period' on Sundays between 6.15 and 7.00 so as to forestall competition.

The effects of the rise of television on the cinema were many. As well as the obvious effects of jobs lost, admissions falling and cinemas closing, the product itself changed to meet a new and more diversified audience. Censorship changed, as ever responding to economic pressures: the 'x' certificate was introduced (1951), and first fully exploited in 1959 by *Room at the Top*. 'B' features vanished, as did newsreels (Granada were the first company to drop theirs, in 1957).

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**'We are not  
going to give  
our films away  
to the rich.'**

**John Boulting, 1968**

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There was an emphasis on larger screens, on CinemaScope and Cinerama, and briefly an experiment with 3-D. Budgets rocketed with a new emphasis on pictorial values—and waste. As Darryl F. Zanuck had put it in 1951: 'We must concentrate on motion pictures and not talking pictures.'

But what prompted these changes in cinema's role as the mass entertainment? Was it the populist programming of ITV? Or films on television? Or more complex factors? Certainly by the 50s the cinema industry had become stultified. It had held its appeal through depression and war and had never been tested in a period of rising expectations. And sapping its strength was the government-imposed Entertainments Tax, which in 1956 took exactly half the net box-office

receipts. (It was not abolished until 1960.)

A further factor was the so-called 'spiral of decline'. John Spraos in his book *The Decline of Cinema* concluded that the demand for films was not independent of the availability of cinemas. When cinemas closed, leaving no competitors, forced absenteeism led to between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of the cinema's audience staying away altogether. With fewer admissions there was less revenue and so less production. Less production meant that the smaller independent cinemas had to close, since the 'booking power' of the circuits kept the best attractions in the hands of Rank and ABC. It has also been suggested that the combines closed more cinemas than was really necessary because they could get a higher return on investment from other uses of the space, whereas independent exhibitors had no other source of income and were more inclined to try to survive the lean years. With their greater cash-flow, the majors could diversify into bingo and bowling.

The key to this decline was the new consumer society created in the 50s during the Churchill and Macmillan governments. In the early 50s advertising rose at an average rate of 13 per cent and shot up with the arrival of ITV in 1955. (The total turnover of Britain's advertising agencies rose from £88m in 1952 to £266m in 1960.) Commercial television became a powerful seller for many branded goods; personal expenditure on entertainment (valued at 1938 prices) rose from £64m in 1938 to £105m in 1948, an increase of 64 per cent. In 1951 there were 2.25m cars and 5 million telephones; by 1953 these figures were 3.25m and 6 million respectively. And the home became more important. 300,000 new houses were built in both 1953 and 1954—cinemas would no longer seem so luxurious. Television sets were also bought in increasing numbers.

John Spraos has identified three distinct periods of television acquisition. Between 1950-55 a disproportionate number of viewers belonged to higher income groups, whose cinema-going was always less frequent and for whom a television set represented a smaller financial burden. Between 1955-58 television spread to the larger working-class householders, the people with the highest rates of cinema-going; and finally (1958-62) it was acquired by the smaller working-class families and by old people, causing less severe damage to cinema attendance figures. Spraos found that the spread of television was related to economic factors and not to the introduction of competitive television. Asa Briggs wrote in *Sound and Vision*: 'The day "television came" stood out as a watershed in family history and buying the first set and paying for the first licence might stand out also as the first large scale, long term family expenditure after the house itself.'

Television was the immediate cause of the decline of the cinema, but the actual cause, something more powerful, was creeping affluence. ■



# THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN: THE

BY GILBERT ADAIR

The recent Mitchell Leisen retrospective at the National Film Theatre has enabled me to see the greater part of an oeuvre of which I had always been vaguely aware, from having caught *Midnight* on television, for example, *Frenchman's Creek* at the Cinémathèque Française, *Hands Across the Table* in the Los Angeles County Museum 'Mirth of a Nation' season and *The Girl Most Likely* on its original release. Leisen himself on these occasions had remained a somewhat unfocused figure. His celebrated flair for décor was fairly evident, as was his expertise in the direction of actors; but I continued to think of him, if at all, as a fabricator of agreeably unpretentious trifles. David Chierichetti's monograph, not very alluringly entitled *Hollywood Director*, did little to temper this relative indifference, its prose running to film-buff hyperbole: Leisen, for him, was 'a Renaissance man' of 'impeccable taste'.

As far as I was concerned, therefore, Leisen had found his niche; if I were to switch on television in the middle of some shimmering Paramount comedy of the 30s, which I recognised as not by Lubitsch, Mamoulian or Wilder, I guessed it to be one of his. What I shall try to demonstrate in this article is that, although my previously splintered view of Leisen's career was, by and large, confirmed by the NFT retrospective, although I cannot see him as other than a minor, derivative film-maker, it is precisely therein that lies the peculiar fascination of his work and its relevance to the history of commercial film-making.

Leisen made his first film, *Cradle Song*, in 1933 for Paramount, the studio at which he was to remain (with one unfortunate exception, Columbia's *The Lady is Willing*) for the next twenty years. But already, since 1919 and *Man and Woman*, he had been employed by that studio as set and costume designer, principally for DeMille. In the early 30s, Paramount was dominated, artistically, by three giants: DeMille, Sternberg and Lubitsch. Although Leisen had been to a certain extent his protégé, it was, of the three, DeMille who least influenced him. DeMille's work was essentially retrograde, a throwback to Hollywood's Old Testament period, the silents. The dialogue of his most characteristic films amounted to little more than spoken intertitles. Academic, in the true nineteenth century sense, rather than primitive, he was less the cinema's Grandpa Moses, as often portrayed, than its Bouguereau or Lord Leighton, artists more deserving than Rousseau, say, of the epithet 'naïve'.

If his brand of slyly self-righteous eroticism was remote from Leisen's much looser, more free-wheeling treatment of sex, it was perhaps DeMille who first showed that only the most extrovert forms of spectacle could rival sheer physicality in the matter of provoking a frisson. It is sufficient to recall what he made of Cleopatra's seduction of Antony: a superb production-number supervised by some brute of a ringmaster, to the cruel rhythm of whose whip dancing-girls in leopard-skin tutus are lowered in nets over the lovers' couch as the camera slowly tracks back to reveal the whole trunk, as it were, of Cleopatra's barge,

from the rib-cage of its galley of slaves to the beating heart of a huge ceremonial drum. What Leisen learned from Sternberg and, in particular, from those six films that have aged as little as their legendary star, was the eroticisation of repression, the transference of desire from the object of desire to what was intended to conceal it, whether veils, lace or shadowy lattice-work. And, finally, from Lubitsch came the notion of Paris as the epitome of European sophistication, a city where Claudette Colbert could buy a pyjama jacket without the trousers and Garbo a preposterous hat perched on her head at the angle of a slipper out of which champagne is being drunk.

This, the house-style inherited by Leisen, was one to which his own somewhat decorative temperament seemed eminently suited. But his case presented certain crucial differences. To begin with, he was a home-grown American, which fact accentuated his basically 'second-generation' status. Paris, Paramount was the only Paris he had known at first hand. Also, it would have been difficult for him to preserve into the late 30s the insouciant, frankly 20s atmosphere of Lubitsch and Mamoulian. In *Trouble in Paradise*, for example, Lubitsch had allowed only one brief farcical scene involving an anarchist to disturb the film's seamless surface, rather in the manner of the famous couplet in *The Rape of the Lock*:

The hungry Judges soon the  
Sentence sign,  
And Wretches hang that Jury-Men  
may dine.  
But audiences had lost sympathy with





# CINEMA OF MITCHELL LEISEN

princes and princesses whose notion of poverty was to drive a taxi or move into a humbler suite at the Ritz. By the time Leisen received his first directorial assignments, even the most feather-brained of comedies were obliged to pay lip service to the economic realities of the period. Thirdly, he was homosexual. This was to become an important factor in the development of his career as the Paramount style curdled into the rampant window-dressing of *Lady in the Dark* (1944), then, in the sunnier, 'healthier' mood of the post-war years, degenerated indiscriminately into Norman Taurog and George Marshall, Betty Hutton and Bing Crosby.

Innate ability, of course, must be taken into account. In many ways Leisen was a gifted director but, unlike Wilder or Sturges, incapable of forging a personal vision out of the Paramount 'look'. Here the titles of his films offer, perhaps, an accurate if superficial guide to the level of their ambitions. *Swing High*, *Swing Low*, *Easy Living*, *Remember the Night*, *Arise My Love*, *No Time for Love*, *To Each His Own*, etc. Anyone's titles really, interchangeable, indistinguishable, suggestive of no precise tone, plot or even genre, they resemble nothing so much as the makeshifts coined for Oscar ceremony scenes in movies about Hollywood.

As for the actors whom, without their ever constituting a 'repertory company', Leisen regularly employed: Fred MacMurray, Carole Lombard, Claudette Colbert, Paulette Goddard, Ray Milland; they are pleasant performers all, often (especially in Leisen's films) considerably more than that. What they have in common, however, is a certain too leisurely

blandness, some indefinable lack of inner tension, of spirituality. Whenever he used a performer with a strong personal mythology—Dietrich in *The Lady is Willing* and *Golden Earrings* or even Ginger Rogers in *Lady in the Dark*—the result was disastrous. Leisen never adapted a work of genuine literary quality (no guarantee of excellence, certainly), and if given a script of more than average literacy, was rarely able to make the finished product his own. *Easy Living*, for example, has a real 'Sturges' feel to it; except that, Leisen being the more accomplished craftsman, it tends to hang together better than most of Sturges' own films. (In spite of all this, Leisen's work manages to display a degree of thematic consistency, which I intend to deal with later.)

The earliest Leisen films I have been able to see, *Death Takes a Holiday* and *Murder at the Vanities* (both 1934), are untypical of his work as a whole. The plot of the former, based on a play by Maxwell Anderson, unfolds as predictably as its title would lead one to suppose. Death assumes human form (in the person of Fredric March) to find out why humans live in dread of him. During his sojourn on earth, no death is recorded save that, of course, of the slightly fey young woman with whom he falls in love. Made stylishly rather than in any particular style, the film is hampered by very dated fantasy material, reminiscent of Barrie at his least inspired, and which might just have worked as comedy. Worth noting, nevertheless, is the skill with which Leisen marshals a large cast, the striking décor of the Italian villa and, especially, the final sequence when Death

and his *inamorata* depart hand in hand, in a shot famous for having foreshadowed the end of *Orphée*.

*Murder at the Vanities* represents a complete change of pace. It concerns a series of mysterious accidents that occur on opening night of the Earl Carroll Vanities, with the show going on regardless and, in the wings, besequined chorines clattering past flats and rigging, up and down narrow spiral staircases, transforming the whole backstage area into a kind of ladies' pirate ship, aided by the rumbustious presence of Victor McLaglen as the detective in charge of the investigation. Carroll himself never appears, this being not the least of his vanities, as his disembodied voice on the telephone is treated with hardly less reverence than the hem of Jesus' cloak in biblical epics. The musical routines are exceptionally bawdy: less the notorious 'Sweet Marijuana', notable mainly for its explicitness, than a number in which scantily clad girls pop out of giant powder puffs and lipsticks, Leisen creating an impression of total, proscribed nudity by filming them consistently at peek-a-boo angles and reflecting them 'unawares' in mirrors.

Before Leisen finally hit his stride with *Hands Across the Table* (1935), he completed three modest fillers: *Behold My Wife* (which I have not seen), *Four Hours to Kill* and *Thirteen Hours by Air*. *Four Hours* is a companion piece to *Murder at the Vanities*, in which several interlocking dramas all come to a head in the very busy lobby of a theatre. The show itself remains invisible throughout; although songs were commissioned for the film, we hear only snatches of them in the back-

'Mittel European cynicism': John Barrymore and Claudette Colbert in 'Midnight' (1939).







Mitchell Leisen (left) and some films: Claudette Colbert buys a hat in 'Midnight'; Carole Lombard in 'Hands Across the Table'

## 'He was a home-grown American... Paris, Paramount

ground. What must have been, in its original stage form, an amusing conceit—the curtain rising on a theatre foyer—is, when thus transferred to the screen, of peculiarly rarefied pointlessness. *Thirteen Hours* (like the later *I Wanted Wings*) is just a conventional aviation picture, in no way fortified by Leisen's own apparently extensive flying experience.

Then came the half-dozen films that constitute the main body of his work, most of them pre-war and all pre-Technicolor. The importance of Technicolor has been insufficiently appreciated, it seems to me, with its tendency to particularise even run-of-the-mill efforts, all sporting their own distinctive colour schemes. On occasion, when Natalie Kalmus was credited as consultant, the effect could be close to monochromatic. For example, I recall (fallibly, perhaps) Wellman's *Nothing Sacred* as predominantly 'green', whereas his black-and-white films, although they doubtless boasted a variety of photographic textures over the years, tend, in recollection, to shade into each other. Such was the case with Leisen, whose interior decorator's tastes were tranquillised in the 30s by the softly muted greys of Paramount cinematography.

This, and a fondness for actors equally adept in comedy and drama, contributed to a noticeably uncertain overlapping of genres in his work. Of the films Leisen directed between 1935 and 1943, all but two (*I Wanted Wings* and *Hold Back the Dawn*) were comedies. But while the Sturges-scripted *Easy Living* can be classified as of the screwball variety, what is one to make of *Arise My Love*, which meanders from comedy to melodrama as cavalierly as its plotline from the Spanish Civil War to World War II? Or *Swing High, Swing Low*, with no plot to speak of, being in the nature of a jam session of behavioural tropes, its only narrative boundaries those which any semi-improvised work organically imposes on itself? At the end of *Hands Across the Table* Ralph Bellamy, in the archetypal Ralph Bellamy role, is required not only to resign himself, as ever, to losing the girl (Carole Lombard) but—presumably in ecstasy over his rival Fred MacMurray's

good fortune—to fall about in his wheelchair and laugh hysterically. Ending a film with liberating laughter was a cliché even in 1935, but one cannot help feeling in this instance, from the intensity of his reaction, that the character has become slightly unhinged.

Such moments, when a breach of narrative decorum causes the spectator momentarily to revise his expectations, abound in Leisen's early work. The opening shots of *Arise My Love*, with Ray Milland awaiting execution in a Spanish prison, would scarcely be out of place in Malraux's *Espoir*; until, that is, reporter Claudette Colbert breezes in to rescue him. *Remember the Night*, a gentle comedy-drama about a district attorney's entanglement with a shoplifter whose trial he has arranged to have adjourned over Christmas, contains a raucously farcical display of courtroom histrionics by Willard Robertson as the defending lawyer. And the mostly genial *Swing High, Swing Low* only just manages to accommodate an excruciating bout of hysteria from Fred MacMurray, made all the more distressing by the actor's visible discomfort.

Although Leisen's comedic range encompassed both working-girl romance (*Hands Across the Table*) and Depression slapstick (*Easy Living*), both Middle American sentimentality (*Remember the Night*) and Mittel European cynicism (*Midnight*), his incapacity to give real cinematic shape to the material renders these films somehow incomplete, if taken separately, and much less easily distinguishable than if directed by various hands. It is feasible, moreover, to conceive of the protagonists, like the actors who portray them, moving relatively undisturbed from one film to another. However unlikely might be the prospect of Barbara Stanwyck's shoplifter reflected in the ormolu of *Midnight*, she would represent no more absurd a hypothesis than the film's actual heroine (Claudette Colbert), herself only a few rungs up from outright criminality; or Jean Arthur, who is propelled into a life of luxury when a mink coat providentially falls on her head in *Easy Living*.

Viewed from such a perspective, Leisen's work in the 30s may be credited

with, at the very least, a kind of continuity, almost an open-endedness. In this, the sole strand of thematic coherence—a pervasive concern with the aspirations, sexual, social and professional, of women in a male-dominated society—is of rather marginal significance. Never interestingly, even adequately, developed within the space of a single film, invariably ending in frustration and defeat (abjectly so, with Ginger Rogers' capitulation to Ray Milland in *Lady in the Dark*) and ultimately about as substantial an ingredient of 'personal vision' as the ubiquitous balloons in the films of Albert Lamorisse, it nevertheless remains a touching constant of the open 'text' that Leisen's world becomes.

Functioning, as he did, in the interstices of other, more creative directors' work, neither hack nor authentic artist but *exactly* halfway between the two, Leisen's by no means negligible talents proved ideally suited to the demands that the industry—and, in particular, the studio with which he was principally associated—was to make on them. And to the extent that the 'Factory of Dreams' was kindest to those at ease in a middle ground of stylish mediocrity, he would come to occupy, like Hathaway at Fox and Clarence Brown at MGM, an almost emblematic position.

I think it can safely be claimed that, notwithstanding some two decades of auteurist badgering, a nagging conviction persists that all but the most memorable of American movies were, just as the discredited Agees, Manvells and Lindgrens assumed them to be, less the result of self-expression than of battery farm techniques—which the day-for-night process might appropriately symbolise—counterbalanced by, at most, a genuinely artisanal attention to detail. If there has been, as I believe, a systematic overvaluation of the 'classic' Hollywood product, it may well be because what Barthes termed '*le plaisir du texte*' operates with immensely greater force and immediacy in the cinema than in literature.

From the mere fact of our absorption of films in the dark, with the screen flickering like the reflected glow of a fire on a bedroom ceiling, and the vaguely





(1935); Edward Arnold in the Sturges-scripted 'Easy Living' (1936); the 'rampant window-dressing' of 'Lady in the Dark' (1944).

## was the only Paris he had known at first hand'

oneiric sensation which this procures us of *seeing without being there*, like staring in through lighted windows from a darkened street, we can deduce the nocturnal, voyeuristic, intrinsically pornographic nature of film-going. Hollywood movies, whatever 'artistic' qualities they possessed, were lighted windows *par excellence*, linked to each other, in the spectator's mind, topographically (as of windows in the same street, or studio) rather than by notions of theme and style. So that the assertion of the authorial voice, the interplay of narrative and characterisation, proper to the textual complexity of literature, gave way to more fragmented pleasures, 'privileged moments' in Truffaut's phrase, recalled with affection long after the films that framed them (and they *were* little more than frames) had faded from memory.

Leisen's work, however compromised as a coherent *oeuvre*, is outstandingly rich in such felicitous notations: the hilarious rococo splendours of Luis Alberni's hotel in *Easy Living*, MacMurray's trumpet solos in *Swing High, Swing Low*, even the poignant 'Thanks for the Memory' duet by Bob Hope and Shirley Ross in the otherwise abysmal *Big Broadcast of 1938*. Like the work of Hathaway, Brown and others of similar standing, it may be seen as a microcosm of the larger Hollywood *roman-fleuve*, no single unit of which is either wholly complete or wholly subservient to the ensemble: in short, less Proust (who wrote one novel, after all, even if it was published in several volumes) than, say, Anthony Powell, the title of whose sequence of novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, itself might stand as a perfect definition of cinema.

The unanimitic concept of narrative that informs Powell's twelve volumes, generated by coincidences, chance meetings and increasingly interconnected relationships, also finds a direct parallel in such parameters of the studio system as contract stars, supporting actors and typecasting, which encouraged the repeated use of the same performers in, more or less, the same codified roles. In Leisen's case, this produced the glamorous, if somewhat unreal, atmosphere of a luxury liner, in which a love affair, for

example, would find itself confined by restrictions of time and space to the more modest dimensions of a shipboard romance, though capable of being reprised with variations in a subsequent film (Lombard and MacMurray taking up in *Swing High, Swing Low* where they left off in *Hands Across the Table*). Behaviour, in the Paramount context 'good manners', took precedence over character, gesture over action, *vignettes* over plot.

With *Lady in the Dark*, however, the situation changed. Leisen was—in my opinion, at least—kicked upstairs, graduating to what even then must dimly have been perceived as *auteur*, or star director, status. Based on a brilliant Broadway musical by Moss Hart and Kurt Weill (based, in turn, on Hart's own experience of psychoanalysis) and benefiting from a generous budget, *Lady in the Dark* remains a prime specimen of that most endearingly camp of sub-genres, the fashion magazine movie (cf., *Cover Girl, Funny Face, Woman's World, The Best of Everything*). It looks, in its three-strip Technicolor, like a mannequin parade in heaven and contains an outrageous cameo by Mischa Auer as a flagrantly homosexual photographer. But the decision of producer Buddy DeSylva (who reportedly loathed Weill) to cut most of the numbers, including Ginger Rogers' final, unrepressed rendering of the pivotal song 'My Ship', is a serious flaw; and the film is noteworthy mostly for tackling head-on the equation, more obliquely posed in the work of Minnelli or Busby Berkeley, between dreams (and, by a Freudian extension that the script quite consciously assumes, sex) and musical comedy spectacle. As for Leisen's second film of 1944, *Frenchman's Creek*, it is a sumptuous costume melodrama (from the novel by Daphne du Maurier), ravishingly designed, exquisitely photographed, amusingly played by Joan Fontaine, and claptrap from start to finish.

Prior to the *dégringolade* of his latter, truly hack period (exemplified by such enticing titles as *Masquerade in Mexico, Bride of Vengeance* and *Darling, How Could You?*), Leisen directed two pleasant films, *Kitty* and *Dream Girl*, in which

the old spark had not entirely been snuffed out; both, oddly enough, recreating in black-and-white the contrasting moods of his most prestigious Technicolor successes. *Kitty* (1945), another frivolous melodrama set in the eighteenth century, with such coffee-house luminaries as Gainsborough and Reynolds making appearances, is considerably more elegant and less garish than *Frenchman's Creek*. *Dream Girl* (1947) is to *Lady in the Dark* what a daydream is to a nightmare. Its potential for delirium is held firmly in check by a bizarrely restrained Betty Hutton, with only our memory of the actress' more frenzied performances to suggest the latent violence of the character's longings.

Then zero. Leisen's visual flair was nowhere apparent in the gypsy camp farrago, *Golden Earrings* (1947), or the preposterous Sol Hurok biopic, *Tonight We Sing* (1953). As a director of actors, his desertion in the face of MacDonald Carey, Arturo De Cordova and John Lund is understandable; but even his old comrade, Fred MacMurray, on the evidence of the NFT retrospective a more expressive light comedian than his current reputation would suggest, had already acquired, in *Suddenly It's Spring* (1947), the complacently avuncular patina of his Disney roles. And when, during the shooting of *The Girl Most Likely* (1957), Leisen's and RKO's last film, the scenery was being dismantled around him, the irony was almost poetic.

Mitchell Leisen never created High Art; one might say, he had no head for heights. But, at his best, he was capable of work which, if not art, disarmed criticism and could be on occasion as graceful and affecting as art. And the final, most apposite simile I can find for this work is, perhaps, the clinic to which, in Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Hans Castorp retires to convalesce, only to discover that, for thrills, all the cataclysms of the outside world pale beside the petty intrigues and flirtations to which his life has been reduced. Let it be a clinic, then, perched halfway up the magic, snow-capped slopes of Paramount's logo. (But where are the snow-machines of yesteryear?) ■



On 28 October 1892, animated drawings delighted an audience at the Musée Grévin in Paris, this event preceding by three years the first public projection of animated photographs—moving pictures—by the Lumière brothers on 28 December 1895, at the Grand Café. Film histories note this fact, but apart from this brief nod to Emile Reynaud's Théâtre Optique neither historians nor theoreticians of cinema have given much thought to animation. The most recent histories either continue to ignore it or repeat the old errors. Yet a more accurate account of the origins of animation now seems possible. Most of the facts have been published somewhere, but never yet put together.

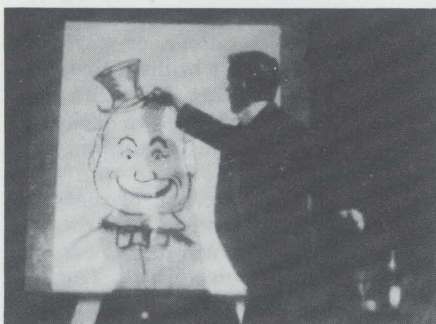
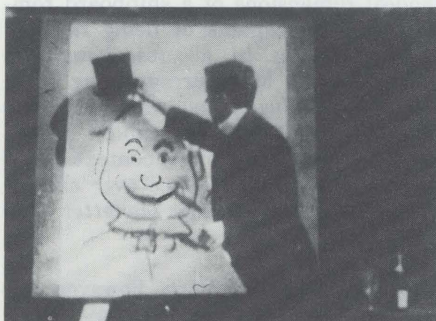
Reynaud's Théâtre Optique performed at the Musée Grévin from 1892 to 1900, with over 12,000 performances witnessed by half a million spectators. Yet it had become obsolete by 1896, for Louis Lumière's Cinématographe made moving pictures too easy. The Théâtre Optique required two projectors behind a translucent screen, one projecting a static background scene, the other the moving figures which Reynaud had painted on a long strip of celluloid. Reynaud constructed little stories by drawing 4 x 5 centimetre pictures, sometimes as many as 700 frames on a 50 metre strip of celluloid. But Louis Lumière could produce 700 frames of animated photographs merely by turning the crank on his Cinématographe for 44 seconds and then printing and projecting them with the same amazing device. No wonder Reynaud threw his apparatus and films into the Seine—but that was in 1910, after animation had been rediscovered.

Despite Reynaud, rediscovery was necessary, for the camera's operation obliterated the techniques of animation. Reynaud's drawings were made one at a time, but the camera produced its string of pictures in almost no time at all—16 or 46 a second—and that was precisely the secret of its magical moving pictures. That the camera could be used differently had to be learned or invented. And it would then take another thirty years before Len Lye and Norman McLaren returned to Reynaud's method of painting directly on film.

The technique of early cinematography consisted in pointing the lens at a subject and then running the camera, either by hand crank or electric motor, until the film ran out or the action ended. The first step in the rediscovery of animation was, of course, to realise that the camera could be stopped and started again before the film ran out, and without moving it or making much change in the scene before it—and that this was somehow worth doing. This realisation first dawned, apparently, on Alfred Clark, who had replaced W. K. L. Dickson in the Black Maria studio, producing film strips for the Edison peep-show device, the Kinetoscope. On 28 August 1895, Clark was filming *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*. The Kinetoscope had perhaps already passed the peak of its glory after a year in which Kinetoscope Parlours had created lines of waiting customers in London and Paris as well as in cities across the United States,

# THE ORIGINS OF ANIMATION

BY ALEXANDER SESONSKE



Two consecutive frames from the Edison studio's *'The Enchanted Drawing'* (1900), made by the stop-action technique.

though it had another year of success yet to record before it would be swept abruptly into the background of film history by the arrival of successful movie projection in New York in the spring and summer of 1896.

Clark's idea was simple enough. When the unfortunate Queen knelt before the headman, Clark stopped his camera, replaced his actress with a dummy, then started the camera again as the axe fell. I have seen no record of how Kinetoscope viewers reacted to this grisly effect, but there were no other film-makers to notice and Clark apparently did not try it again soon. The reason he failed to recognise what he had done, we may surmise, was that Clark had conceived the idea as a means for increasing the realism of the scene and not for making magic. And for the lone viewer of the tiny Kinetoscope image, the effect may have been hardly

noticeable, that is, no more startling than the mere fact of moving pictures.

Hence the effective, i.e. influential, discovery of this technique was left for that moment when Georges Méliès' camera is said to have momentarily jammed while he was shooting the passing traffic in the Place de l'Opéra. But Méliès was a showman, a magician, an entertainer, and when he viewed his 'spoiled' film and saw the instantaneous transformation of men into women, an omnibus into a hearse, he saw immediately what the possibilities were.

The date of this revelation is uncertain, perhaps as early as October 1896, but most probably early 1898, since the outpouring of fantasy films employing the technique that Méliès called 'substitution par arrêt au tour de manivelle' begins early in 1898\*. By the end of 1898 almost every man with a movie camera had learned from Méliès' films the marvellous effects that could be achieved by this stop-action technique; and in 1899 trick films abound in England and the United States as well as France, though almost invariably lacking the perfection achieved by Méliès in his little Montreuil studio.

Méliès also produced in 1898 the first sequences of *photographed* animation in a series of little commercial films made to be projected on an open-air screen on the Boulevard des Italiens. In some of these 'films de publicité' a comic scene would end with a shot of scrambled letters arranging themselves to form the name of the product, e.g. Bornibus Mustard. Méliès achieved this effect, which delighted the pedestrians on the boulevard, by arranging white letters on a black table-top and then rearranging them between the moments when the crank of the camera was given an eighth or quarter turn to expose one or two frames. This invention of animated titles apparently did not suggest to Méliès the use of model animation in his trick films; or if it did he found it much easier to give life to objects in his films by moving them with invisible wires, as he had done on the stage of his Théâtre Robert Houdin. But the task of creating titles for use within these commercial films may have been instrumental in leading Méliès to introduce titles between the shots of his narrative films, such as *L'Affaire Dreyfus* in 1899.

Méliès was apparently also the first film-maker after Reynaud to project drawings on the screen, having himself photographed drawing sketches of well-known people, with the camera turning slowly so that the projected film was accelerated, creating what Méliès called 'dessins express'. Thus before 1900 Méliès had introduced into cinema what would become the two major ingredients of animation, frame by frame photography and photographed drawings, but apparently did not think of combining them.

Photographed drawings appear again in 1900, in the Edison studio's *The Enchanted Drawing*, often cited as the first animated film. But there is no ani-

\*The incident itself may even be apocryphal.



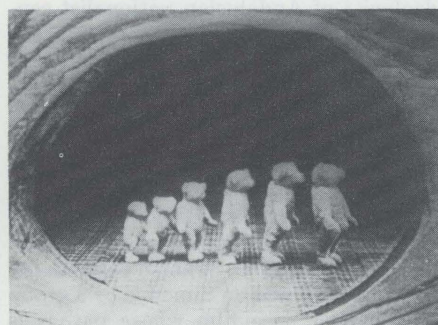
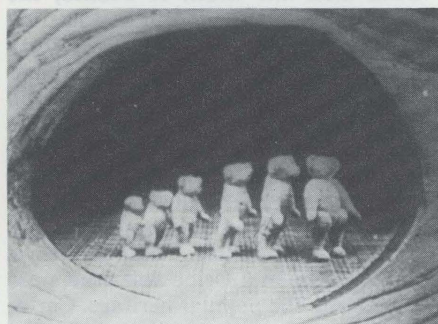
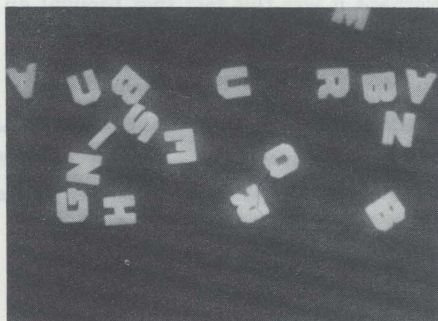
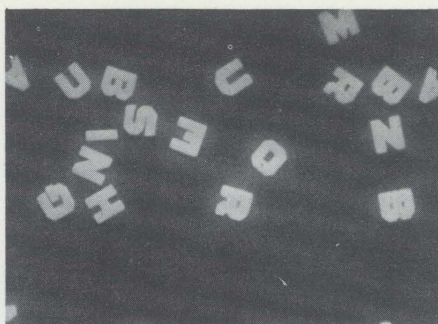
mation in *The Enchanted Drawing*. Rather the technique is the by now familiar stop-action applied to a drawing. Several times the camera stops and one drawing is replaced by another very similar one, e.g. a frown turns into a smile, but there is no frame-by-frame animation.

After Méliès, the next genuine animation sequence seems to be that created in England around 1900 by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. Again it appears in a propaganda/commercial film, an appeal for the Boer War done with animated matchsticks. Since this is the only known example of animation in Britain in this period, it seems most probable that the technique was that employed by Méliès, using an eighth or quarter turn to expose one or two frames. Hence I conclude that by 1900 the idea of animation had occurred to two film-makers, but no appropriate technology had been developed. That, I think, awaited the work of a man who was, perhaps, more interested in mechanics than movies, Edwin S. Porter.

Porter's reputation as the great pre-Griffith pioneer has declined drastically in recent years as it has become more and more evident that almost all his 'innovations' were based upon earlier French or British films that Porter had an opportunity to see, though he often improved on his source. Yet the one area in Porter's work which critics have hardly mentioned for fifty years, animation, may be the one in which he was most genuinely innovative. An interview published in 1912 in *The Moving Picture World*, though riddled with erroneous claims, indicates that Porter himself may well have considered animation, or 'stop-motion', as he called it, his greatest invention.

In his Montreuil studio, Georges Méliès' camera was firmly anchored to the floor—this was a necessity for his trick films. But he also took his camera out into the world and, for the Paris Exposition of 1900, mounted it on a tripod with a panoramic head designed by Grimois-Sanson. Méliès shot over 1100 feet of film of the Exposition, much of it in 'panoramic' views. These circular panoramas were imported into the United States by the Edison Company and probably inspired Porter to try to outdo Méliès at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901. Here Porter not only took a circular panorama of the Electric Tower, but then decided to repeat this at night. Since the night shot required 10-second exposures, Porter had to alter his camera to allow him to photograph by single frames with controlled exposure, thus producing what probably became the first animation camera. He was, of course, familiar with Méliès' stop-action technique, visible for example in his *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1902) and in many Edison films from 1899 on.

According to the 1912 interview, the first film in which Porter used 'stop-motion' was *The 'Teddy' Bears*, but either Porter's memory was bad or the reporter, George Blaisdell, has garbled the story; for *The 'Teddy' Bears* was probably Porter's last, not his first ani-



Consecutive frames from Edwin S. Porter's *'How Jones Lost His Roll'* (top) and from the 1907 film, *'The "Teddy" Bears'*.

mated film. The earliest extant American animation occurs in Porter's *How Jones Lost His Roll*, copyrighted 27 March 1905. Here Porter rediscovered the technique of animated titles invented by Méliès in 1898. *How Jones Lost His Roll* consists of seven sections, each beginning with elaborate animated titles, with the brief pictures that follow serving mainly as illustrations of the titles.

Both the Méliès and the Melbourne-Cooper animation occurred in films not for export, commercials. Hence it seems highly unlikely that Porter had seen any examples of earlier animation but that he had, indeed, reinvented it himself. *How Jones Lost His Roll* uses double-frame animation, that is, the letters are rearranged every second frame. It is this which makes me suggest that the earlier Méliès and Melbourne-Cooper animation

may have required a quarter rather than an eighth turn of the crank.

Porter produced a second film with animated titles two months later, *The Whole Dam Family and the Dam Dog*, copyright 30 May 1905. Here the titles are only a small part of the film and include an animated dog who, like the titles, comes together out of scrambled pieces, then wags his tail and disperses the titles again.

In 1906 Porter moved from animated titles to model animation in *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, where shoes walk across the floor and furniture moves about by itself. 1906 also saw the appearance of Stuart Blackton's *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, probably the film most often cited as the first animated film. In his 1912 interview, Porter claimed that he had the field of stop-motion to himself for two years before anyone else discovered how it was done, which may suggest that *How Jones Lost His Roll* was not his first use of this technique—or, given the general inaccuracy of the interview, may confirm that it was. However that may be, the secret was really out by mid-1907, when films using model animation began to proliferate in the United States and Blackton's *The Haunted House* reached Paris where, though Georges Méliès was still making films, Sadoul reports that only Emile Cohl divined the secret of this 'mouvement américain'. *El Hotel Elettrico* by Secundo de Chomón, sometimes cited as an example of European animation before either *The Haunted House* or any of Cohl's work, was not, in fact, made by animation techniques but by moving objects with invisible wires (see Jean Mitry, *Histoire du Cinéma*, Vol. 2, p. 36).

But before all this happened Edwin S. Porter made his last and best animated film, *The 'Teddy' Bears*, copyright 5 February 1907, hence made at least five months before *The Haunted House*.

*The 'Teddy' Bears* has its origin in an incident in Mississippi in 1902, where President Theodore Roosevelt had gone to settle a boundary dispute. That done, he went hunting. But when a tired, lame bear was run down, Roosevelt refused to let it be shot. This story reached Washington, where the *Washington Post* published a cartoon by Charles Berryman, showing Teddy Roosevelt sparing the poor bear. The cartoon was widely circulated and the 'Roosevelt Bear' became known throughout the country. In 1903 a Brooklyn candy store owner made two stuffed bears for his store window and, with Roosevelt's permission, named them 'Teddy' Bears. He was soon in the toy business.

By 1906 the craze had swept America. The bears became popular toys, available in many sizes. The sight of six stuffed bears, graduated in size, in a toy store window may have inspired Porter to undertake his most ambitious stop-motion film, setting it in the context of a version of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' which makes clear its origin in Roosevelt's Mississippi adventure.

For most of its 14 minutes *The 'Teddy' Bears* is a movie version of Goldilocks, played by actors in bearskins. The three



bears go for a Sunday walk, with Baby bear clutching a 'Teddy' bear as he goes. Goldilocks wanders in and explores the house; when she is discovered in bed she climbs out of a window, taking a 'Teddy' bear with her. A four-shot chase through snowy landscapes, which contrast sharply with earlier painted scenery, ends when Goldilocks is rescued by a hunter who resembles Teddy Roosevelt and wears a Rough Rider hat. But this Teddy doesn't spare the bears; he shoots Mama and Papa bear dead and is only stopped by Goldilocks from doing away with Baby too. Then Goldilocks and her saviour lead Baby bear on a chain back to the house where Goldilocks carts off half-a-

dozen of the 'Teddy' bears.

All this makes an amusing enough film, of good quality by 1907 standards. But in the midst of it Porter inserted a wholly irrelevant two minutes of pure animation. Goldilocks looks through a knot-hole and watches six 'Teddy' bears of graduated sizes perform acrobatics and close-order drill, achieved in very skilful single-frame animation. This sequence Porter described in 1912 as having required him to work eight hours a day for a week to produce 90 feet of film. Perhaps it was this fact that brought an end to Porter's career in animation; for in the rapidly expanding cinema industry of 1907 there were certainly more profit-

able ways for the head of production in a major studio to spend his time.

By mid-summer of 1907 both Biograph and Vitagraph had released films using model animation, with animated scenes more ambitious in scope but no more skilfully executed than Porter's. Of those I have seen, only *The 'Teddy' Bears* points toward what would become the main stream of animated films, with anthropomorphised animals as central characters. By 1908 Emile Cohl had solved the mystery of *The Haunted House* and would soon become the first recognised French practitioner of the art and the first full-time animated filmmaker anywhere. ■

## REPORTING FROM MADRID...

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contradiction to the constitution's guarantee of individual rights.\* In fact, the torture scenes in the film are muted in comparison with what was actually done. Pilar Miró comments: 'All this has happened because in this country we're not used to talking about unpleasant things. Before Franco's death it was impossible to deal with these subjects, but they haven't been tackled since then either.' Spain remains a country where if a murderer is a doctor, doctors protest, if an army officer is a sadist, army officers protest, even if it is true and can be proved.

The most popular recent films have been those produced by José María González Sinde and directed by José Luis Garci: *Asignatura pendiente* (Exam Pending, 1977), *Solos en la madrugada* (Alone at Dawn, 1978) and *Las Verdes praderas* (The Green Meadows, 1979). Topical, witty and demotic, they have grossed over 400 million pesetas (£3m) at the box office. The first two starred José Sacristán, who has come to represent the middle-brow Spaniard of around forty still working out the frustrations imposed by the dictatorship. The fourth, *¡Viva la clase media!* (Long Live the Middle Class), this time produced by Garci and directed by González Sinde, is a farce about clandestine Communists in the early 60s. Another successful film, directed by veteran Rafael Gil, was *La Boda del Señor Cura* (The Priest's Wedding), based on the true story of a Falangist Jesuit who ended up the liberal husband of a striptease artiste.

Meanwhile sex cinemas proliferate in the cities. *Salò* has at last been passed, and *Empire of the Senses* is rumoured to be in the pipeline. Not content with shooting those they regard as undesirable, the politico-military wing of ETA are now concerned with culture. On the same day in Bilbao they interrupted showings of three pornographic films. In each case, two men bought tickets, sat down and, during the screening, walked

into the aisle, fired a few shots into the air, shouted that such films caused rapes, then quickly left.

Soon after the death of Franco, the novelist Juan Goytisolo said in a lecture: 'A people which have lived nearly forty years in a state of irresponsibility and impotence are a people necessarily ill, whose convalescence will be prolonged in direct proportion to the duration of the illness.' The waste of talent exemplified in the careers of Antonio del Amo and José Antonio Nieves Conde is one of the legacies of that illness. Antonio Drove, Pilar Miró, Imanol Uribe and others are recuperating the popular heritage. Carlos Fernández has made a film about the ideologist of Andalusian nationalist sentiment, Blas Infante, shot on the Carmona road at the beginning of the Civil War. Such films are necessary now, when fascist hooligans are still active in the streets of Madrid.

No film made in Spain about the Civil War has been as affecting as *En el balcón vacío* (On the Empty Balcony), directed in 1962 by Jomi García Ascot and written by María Luisa Elio, Spanish exiles living in Mexico. Filmed on Sundays by a group of friends, it is a film whose pathos is overpowering, and with the possible exception of *Sierra de Teruel* it is the finest film to come out of the Civil War. But the extent of virgin territory is still considerable: the revolution in Asturias in 1934, for example, or the strikes and boycotts in 1951. Imanol Uribe has been working on a project for a film about Casas Viejas, the village where there was an anarchist rising in 1933.

As regards finance, films are now being made in co-operation with Spanish television out of a fund of 1,300 million pesetas (£9m). The first film to be completed is *Dedicatoria* (Dedication), directed by Jaime Chavarrí. The danger is the degree of control that television may exert. Drove believes it is possible to make a film co-operatively in 16mm for £14,000, which could be shown in film clubs, outside the normal channels of distribution. Certainly, the present system of distribution needs to be circumvented. Cinemas are obliged to show one day of Spanish films for every three days of foreign films, but the cinema proprietors can relegate Spanish films to the

uncommercial months of January, August and September. Recourse is already being made to re-releases to fulfil the Spanish quota. *La Sabina* was taken off in Barcelona, where it was doing good business, when it had fulfilled its part of the quota. The rush is to take advantage of the flood of foreign films now permitted. In 1979, 631 films opened in Madrid, of which 199 were American, including 41 re-releases, and 110 Italian. 109 were 'S' films, the rating given to sex and/or violence. Only 72 were Spanish.

In August 1930, eight months before the declaration of the Second Republic, Juan Piqueras, friend of Buñuel (Julio Alejandro claims they wrote a script of *Wuthering Heights* in Paris before Buñuel made *Las Hurdes*), wrote an article in *La Gaceta Literaria* in connection with Florian Rey's *La Aldea Maldita*, a Spanish silent classic. Piqueras observed that if Spanish directors 'had set about getting to the marrow of Spain, of its history, of its labour and social problems, we would surely have the films that we lack, and our masses would go to see themselves and to see their own problem latent on the screen. Just as France and Russia have made films in which to the artistic aspect of the work there is joined a political background (a re-examination of historical events) to justify later social attitudes, so Spain should also make them so as not to tolerate precisely what at present is tolerated and justified.'

Piqueras would doubtless have approved of *La Verdad sobre el caso Savolta*. The field remains wide open. There are between fifteen and twenty directors capable of valuable work, even allowing for the observation by Angel Ganivet in his *Idearium Español*, on the nature of the Spanish genius, that there are no leaps forward as with the French or the English: when a Spaniard begins a piece of work it may equally well turn out very good or very bad. (The career of Buñuel is an example.) Or, as *Primer Plano*, the Falangist cinema magazine, put it in 1940: 'It's worth being alive today, and there is no greater pride in the world than being Spanish... because once again the finger of God offers us the possibility of occupying the ontological centre of the world.' ■

\*On 16 May the *Guardian* reported a debate in the Spanish Chamber of Deputies after a question about the seizure of copies of *El Crimen de Cuenca*. The debate on freedom of expression 'provoked the angriest scenes in the short history of Spain's post-Franco Cortes.'





# WORKING WITH HITCHCOCK

By IVOR MONTAGU

My periods of active association with Alfred Hitchcock were two: briefly at the start of his career, around 1926-27, and rather later for a little longer, when he was already a master craftsman, from 1934 to 1936.

By 1926 I had said goodbye to Cambridge and, for a time, zoology. The Film Society had been founded, to a generally frosty welcome from the film trade, which saw in its Sunday gatherings an implied criticism—which was not intended—of their own standards and choice of product for public presentation. I had myself infiltrated into the film industry, or the edge of it, through Adrian Brunel, than whom there was no better teacher. Adrian had some tiny rooms where he and his cronies ran a sort of film knacker's business—repair and rebeautifying of ravaged pictures—off a narrow staircase in Dansey Yard, behind Shaftesbury Avenue. He helped us to title-translate and get ready the Film Society imports, and I crept in, like many other luminaries of British film-making before and after, by sitting and watching and passing, on demand, out of reach paper clips, elastic bands, and even film cuts that dangled precariously over waste bins. Sooner or later Adrian would take pity on us and put us on the payroll; which was, of course, not quite the same as finding us a regular salary.

After a few months I became a partner in this very happy, if slightly happy-go-lucky enterprise, with more responsibilities. Adrian was often away. He was under contract to Mick (later Sir Michael) Balcon at Gainsborough stu-

dios, and this meant a constant striving not to be neglected in the queue for production space within that dingy warehouse.

Suddenly a phone call from Mick. Would I lunch in Piccadilly with him and Adrian? I said yes, of course, and over my fried onions and mashed potatoes Mick explained. He was in a difficulty. Hitchcock—a shadowy figure at that time, whom I vaguely knew by name—had just finished a picture and Mick could not get the distributor to show it. He had taken a risk in promoting Hitch from floor assistant actually to direct. (Mick, all his life, loved recruiting fresh talent to direction, and this was not the least of his blessings to British film production.) But this was now not Hitch's

first picture for the company but his third, and the distributor would have none of any of them. The mounting unused investment was becoming impossible for Balcon to defend.

At this juncture Adrian had had an idea. What was the distributor's chief grudge against the latest Hitchcock—*The Lodger* by name? It was supposed to be highbrow, the most scarlet epithet in the film trade vocabulary. Hitch, indeed, was deeply suspected by the distributors of this damning fault. Had he not even been trained in an art school, and entered the film world drawing the lettering and little decorative pictures on titles? I had been to a university and was mixed up with the Film Society, so I must be a highbrow too. What about getting me to re-edit *The Lodger*, on the obvious analogy of setting a thief to catch a thief? Mick from the start had been one of the rare film bigwigs who backed the Film Society. Adrian's proposal struck a chord.

They ran the film, with which at once I fell enthusiastically in love. Now, the hackneyed treatment of the plot and a weakness in characterisation makes it look primitive. Then, by contrast with the work of his seniors and contemporaries, all Hitch's special qualities stood out raw: the narrative skill, the ability to tell the story and create the tension in graphic combination, and the feeling for London scenes and characters. At first I felt a certain embarrassment. Hitchcock, five years older than I, had three pictures already tucked under his belt, if as yet unshown. I, a novice, was set up to sit in judgment. But Hitch was ungrudgingly



Top: Hitchcock (foreground) as a newspaperman in *'The Lodger'*; Ted McKnight Kauffer's main title.





warm to the newcomer, eager to hear of anything that, even by chance, might make his work more acceptable.

It was at once obvious that what the film needed was editing *toward*, not *away from*, its exceptional qualities. Hitchcock's two unseen pictures had been made in Munich, and he was clearly influenced by the photography of the German silent thrillers, which made much more use than British run-of-the-mill productions of arbitrary light and shade to heighten tensions.

My suggestions were quickly and generously adopted. The two most important were rank plagiarisms. The first point: as finished in its first-cut version *The Lodger* was cluttered with titles—mostly unnecessary but, according to the fashion for a silent feature at that time, numbering in the region of 350 to 500. I remembered the German *Warning Shadows*, which had so recently impressed us all without one single title, and I got *The Lodger's* titles down to 80.

Second. Of these titles many were just the one-word repetition of the heroine's name, 'Daisy'. We had all seen and been enchanted by Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*. Here he achieves a romantic effect by repeating a one-word title, the name of his dream sweetheart, the dance-hall hostess 'Gloria'. *The Lodger* is a Jack the Ripper story of an assassin—never seen in the film—who murders fair-haired girls, and Daisy is threatened. In her case a menacing effect is contrived by the repetition of her name. I have always been astonished that, so far as I am aware, no one has ever remarked this obvious pinch in print.

Third, Ted McKnight Kauffer, the American poster artist who revolutionised British poster design, was another Film Society stalwart. We persuaded him to draw us sinister title backgrounds. Fourth was just an ordinary matter of re-shooting scenes where it seemed the intended effect had not quite come off.

Hitch accepted all without the slightest demur. So did Mick.

I have gone into this detail to make sure that the limits of my interference are clear. This was a critical film in Hitch's career, maybe in British film history. I enjoyed the opportunity to contribute so much that I might have been tempted to overestimate my contribution. Not so. The picture was good and the extent of my abilities is not and never has been in that league. My contribution was in the nature of that which a gallery director makes to a painting in suggesting how it should be framed, where hung and in what light. Much the most important consequence was that the changes renewed Mick's confidence. The press show ate up the picture, so did the trade show, and later the public. *The Lodger*, as Mick had hoped, opened the door to the two delayed predecessors waiting in the wings, and from then on Hitch was unstoppable.

The fairy-tale result for me was that I was instantly engaged by Gainsborough to supervise scripts all day and editing all night. (At £40 a week for both.) I did other things besides. I wrote a story on a half sheet of paper that Adrian directed with Godfrey Winn and the Houston Sisters. I repaired wrecks. On one of these I too clashed with Hitch's distributor-ogre. During the argument he said to Mick: 'Of course Montagu does not understand, he is a gentleman.' This slander I considered the ultimate insult.

Anyway I expect I did too much and became irritable. I disagreed with Hitch. I see from records that I am credited with 'editing' his next two pictures, *Downhill* and *Easy Virtue*, but I remember very little about them except that I argued with him about a shot in *Easy Virtue* that I did not like at all. It was a matter of what the press had already learned to call 'the Hitchcock touch'.

Before explaining this I should mention a significant incident. A little group

of kindred spirits used to meet in Adrian's flat, often after premières, let our hair down and take apart what we had just seen, and anything and anybody else we could think of, in what we called 'Hate Parties'. We would descant on everything we didn't like—or even did—in cinema.

At one such the question came up: 'For whom, primarily, do we make films? Whom is it most important to please?' 'The public' as an answer was far too simple. Equally obvious and unsatisfying was the alternative, 'the boss'. Hitch would have none of either answer. Others, knowing of Hitch's troubles with *The Lodger* and before, suggested 'the distributors', acknowledging the validity of what they thought was Hitch's point: that, unless the distributor liked and would push the picture, the public might never have a chance to give it a fair box-office reaction, even if you had your own boss's support. Hitch's deeper answer, however, was that you must make pictures for the press. This, he explained quite frankly, was the reason for 'the Hitchcock touches'—novel shots that the critics would pick out and comment upon—as well as the trademark he later made his own (picked up admittedly from Chaplin's porter shouldering the trunk in *A Woman of Paris*) of a momentary flash appearance in every film he directed. If we had thought there was charlatanism about this we would have found it odious. But we were all friends, who understood him and knew exactly what he meant.

He went on to explain that, if you made yourself publicly known as a director—and this you could only do by getting mention in the press *in connection with your directing*—this would be the only way you became free to do what you wanted. If your name were known to the public you would not be the prisoner of where you happened to be working—you could move on. Any newly founded





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Left to right: Hitchcock's personal appearances in 'Blackmail' and 'Sabotage'; an unusual publicity picture (counting the takings?) from the early 1930s.

company (there were many in the UK in those days) would be glad to have the cachet of your name as an asset in its prospectus. Any established company would like to sign you in order to score over its rivals.

We all knew this was right. We all knew him well enough to know that while the fame and money of success might be to him a pleasant side-effect, it was not, could not be his primary motive. He lived to make pictures. To make them better was his use for freedom. But we also knew he would never have admitted this, and so he spoke after his manner, drily, sarcastically, cynically, teasingly, and we did not mind. He was the only one of us who might succeed in reaching his objective. We might envy him but we respected him and wished him well.

Anyway he did follow out this path, as his career record testifies. And another thing. Not many years later Sidney Bernstein put out a questionnaire to the patrons in all his theatres: 'What do you like? Not like? Why?' That sort of thing. The only American director his audiences had heard of, and therefore about the only one that cropped up in the answers besides blanks and 'Disney' was Lubitsch. And the only British one was Hitchcock.

Back to our disagreement. *Easy Virtue*—the Coward play—is a triangle story, and the scene was a car bringing husband, wife and lover back from the theatre. Husband and wife sat on the back seat, the lover on one of a pair of folding seats facing them. So the lover could play 'knees-touch' with the lady, unbeknownst to the husband and illuminated only by the irregular passage of street lamps and headlights. Hitch shot it from above, of course. An excellent 'touch'. Only... Only this time he had used the wrong lens and the knees were too far away.

Of all shots, I hate worst anything that in reality would be impossible to see.

A pan that goes through a wall, for example, or the cliché shot of the romantic pair in front of the hearth, shot from straight through the flames. I am convinced that shots like these are liable to jolt the spectator out of identifying with the scene.

We could not re-shoot. The car and set had been dismantled. I wanted to cut it. I said it was obvious that the shot as it was showed an impossible view, which was bound to have been obstructed at that distance by the roof of the car. Hitch wanted to keep it in. He argued that if anybody did notice, nobody would mind. I have no idea which of us Mick would have supported. I preferred not to ask. I have always preferred to walk out rather than quarrel with a friend; rather, that is, than risk winning the quarrel and losing the friendship.

★ ★ ★ ★

In the intervening years I of course met Hitch, but not for work. He travelled the path that he had planned. 1929 I spent in Hollywood with Paramount, the latter part working with Eisenstein on the two famous scripts that were eventually published but never shot. Back in Europe fascism was rising, and when I returned to Britain politics kept me too busy to go back to film. I was at a desk at the *Daily Worker* when the phone rang. There was Mick again, once more in a spot of bother and thinking of his former trouble-shooter. It was to be a one-off proposition—'just a few weeks'.

'To start when?' 'Now or yesterday.' Mick was in charge of the new Gaumont-British studios at Shepherd's Bush, with more pictures cramming its floors than could be accommodated in Lime Grove. In addition, the English-language remake of an Italian singing picture was scheduled for immediate production outside at Beaconsfield. Its only just costed script had turned out far over budget. It was to

start next Monday. Would I take over as Associate Producer and make it cheaper? It may seem odd that I was to be entrusted with so responsible a task, but in those days the aura of Hollywood was so elevated that any Britisher who had visited the place and came back alive found some of it rub off on him.

An AP was (still is?) someone who deputises for the producer-in-chief and exercises his authority in relation to a fraction of the projects undertaken by the chief. When the scale of production is as large as it was at Gaumont-British, no one man could give adequate attention to all the details on every item. He would therefore allot care of two or three pictures a year to lesser beings, charged with acting as parent substitute at every stage from conception to delivery. In Hollywood, where use of this grade was a general practice, it was reputed to include the lowest forms of animal life, because the most numerous owed their jobs to nepotism and the most unpleasant spent their time intriguing to replace their boss. I had known human ones, however, and as this job, a remake, could only be routine, even the facts that I am tone-deaf and that it was a musical did not make me blench. I postponed the starting date for a week and cut the film on paper as I would have cut it on celluloid after it had been shot. The net saving was in the region of £10,000, and what was left when we had finished production was smooth enough to get an Academy Award nomination in that year. White-headed boy stuff again. And, to my surprise and delight, reunion with Hitch. The moment just happened to be lucky.

Hitch himself, after completing ten films for British International Pictures, some super, others not quite so, had struck out on his own with an independent, choosing as subject for some reason unknown his first (and I think only) musical, hiring the Bush accommodation for the purpose, and turning out an almighty flop.

Suffering from the trauma of this experience, he therefore rushed eagerly back to the arms of Mick Balcon, especially as he had prospects of a thriller he knew he would be able to do well with. In this set-up my accidental presence could only add to the atmosphere of home-coming, and before the fatted calves were fully consumed all round, there was I, a regular Gaumont-British AP, with the assignment to supervise all Hitch's pictures as my priority and leave to pursue my own private (e.g. political) matters in my 'spare time'. Hitch welcomed me as easily as if we had never been apart. There followed the four totally different pictures in the genre he made his own: *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The Thirty Nine Steps*, *The Secret Agent*, *Sabotage*.

Hitch was now at the height of his powers. It was a joy to work with him.





He was a master craftsman in four fields—not only the original three: as a narrator, the telling of a story so as to engage and rivet the attention of the audience; as a graphic artist, the imagination to render the story's essence, its timing and intensification, in pictorial images heightened by carefully selected sound; as an observer, the ability to weave into the most improbable plots elements of reality, familiar settings (especially those of London) and people, which could by their very ordinariness fortify credibility (a trick almost Shakespearian).

This, or its germ at least, was there before. The fourth faculty, now added, was technical mastery and assurance. Every AP is familiar with the nightmare director who is incapable of visualising or deciding anything beforehand; who requires his sets to be built with four sides, and then stands in the middle waiting for inspiration to suggest the action to him before he can move out one wall and position the camera so that the crew can set the lights. Or the one who cannot visualise the cutting afterwards and wants two or three cameras to work simultaneously, so that all lighting becomes a compromise and all takes overlap. Hitch knew so well what he was going to do that he could draw the exact tiny fraction of background which was all he would need built, because he knew what would be in the shot and how far away to back the precise action, already laid down clearly in the script. And in Dickie Beville, his devoted unit manager of those days, he had someone who could convey this exactly to the unit and be sure it would be there.

He was as popular with his casts as with his crews, for the same reason: knowing his own mind. Hitch has often been quoted as saying that actors are cattle. That, when the script was finished, for him the picture was finished. Yet I have heard stars say he was their

favourite director. A paradox? No. He was essentially an extremely shy man, who would have died rather than give anyone a clue to the heart he hid under his sleeve. So he adopted a tactic of brusque exaggeration, slow sarcasm accentuated by deliberate articulation, so outrageous that no one could take offence because they had to pretend he must be joking. Women stars, especially, would at first be taken aback. Soon they would accept it as a sort of compliment of intimacy, which of course it was. What he said could not be ignored, but the victim, attention won, would roll it round his mind and ponder it to extract its invariable grain of sense.

I never saw Hitch impatient; I never saw him lose his temper. There was once a terrible day when we needed a two-shot love scene between an experienced woman star and her beau, a handsome gallant but a novice. She was word perfect, excellent and spontaneous from the very first take. He could not get near remembering his lines until the twenty-fourth. In the end we had to print all the takes and pick out one from about the middle, when he was nearing intelligibility and she, though tired, not yet objectionably stale. Hitch was more polite and gentle at the end than at the beginning.

The story conferences were a feast of fancy and of dialectic, a mixture of composing crosswords and solving them, both laced with humour. We would sit around in his flat. Sometimes Alma Hitchcock would be there; sometimes the scenario editor Angus MacPhail, my old school-mate. It was Angus who established the term 'MacGuffin' for the unknown plot objective which you did not need to choose until the story planning was complete. (This convenient word Hitch gleefully adopted and used to the end of his career.) Hitch had also received from an admirer a marvellous Hollywood book, *Plotto*, which contained some 3,000

plot variations, all carefully indexed.

The unfolding story was elaborated with suggestions from all of us; everything was welcome, if not always agreed. Like anyone else, Hitch would sometimes reject an idea when it was put forward, sleep on it and return with it next morning as his own; which by then it undoubtedly was, since it could only be incorporated when adjusted in his own head to make it fit. We would search for ideas in books, in plays, in odd scenes in the street. Not straight copying, usually, but ideas to prompt ideas. At the Albert Hall one day, I heard the Appenzellers at an International Folk Festival produce a thrilling sound by rotating marbles in a big stone bowl. That we used in a Swiss scene in *Secret Agent*. In the end, the scripts were by consensus; the only special privilege their credited authors had was to write them down. The scenes of course were finalised by Hitch and his verbal texts then duplicated from the writers' notes. Mick never interfered. He simply created the conditions and confidence for us to work.

This sounds a paradise compared to the conflicts that attend most film-making. Quite early, however, we had one down and up, a curious echo of the past. Film reality is always more incredible than fiction. Our first of the four, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, had an enormous success, and in fact we learned later that it broke attendance records for almost every theatre it played. It was a cheap picture even for those days—about £40,000. And of course it played the whole GB circuit. By then we had finished the script of its successor, *Thirty Nine Steps*, and were feeling well pleased with ourselves.

Mick went off to New York for a brief visit to try to get American distribution, leaving in temporary charge of Lime Grove that same distributor hero-villain who figures in *The Lodger* episode of this memoir. On his first studio visit both





Far left: Madeleine Carroll handcuffed to Robert Donat in 'The Thirty Nine Steps'. Left: Sylvia Sidney and Oscar Homolka in the murder scene of 'Sabotage'.

Hitch and I were sent for. The great man informed us that *The Man Who Knew Too Much* had lost a lot of money. When we doubted this, he explained that he had booked the picture as a second feature. This meant, in those days, that on each showing there had been accounted to its credit only a derisory booking fee, say ten or twenty pounds, for that was the practice—the percentage of takings went always to the first feature. The real value of the film had been totally discarded, for the record attendances had not varied whatever routine Hollywood 'first feature' accompanied it.

'The company could not afford more of our highbrow stuff,' we were told. We must consider ourselves sacked. 'What about *The Thirty Nine Steps*?' That the distributor had read. Another piece of rubbish. It would not be proceeded with. However, if we wished to work out our month's notice we might stay in the studio and prepare a script on a musical called *Lily of Laguna*, based on the life of Leslie Stuart, a deceased composer of popular songs. The distributor assured us that this was just what the public wanted and was bound to be a great success. Fortunately Mick came back in time to save both us and the studio.

★ ★ ★ ★

My opinions on some of the questions I have seen raised about Hitch? Was he a kind man? I should say: certainly, also a family man. Was he cruel? No. When I knew him, and doubtless later, he loved practical jokes, but I never knew him to play one except as part of a tit-for-tat series with a friend who would repay and surpass them in return. This attitude extended to work. When we cast Madeleine Carroll in *The Thirty Nine Steps* we chose her for her beauty, which Hitch, with his precise sarcasm, designated as 'glossy'. We deliberately wrote the script to include her undignified handcuff scene

on the bed, and being led out from under the waterfall looking like a drowned rat. But Madeleine was a trouser and turned the tables on us by appreciating this treatment and asking for more. Of course Hitch had divined that she would. This quality in her was what enabled her to play perfectly both the spiteful resentment and, credibly, the build-up to final reconciliation with the hero.

The psychopathology of Hitch? I didn't believe a word of it, for all the analyses of French enthusiasts. I do not believe, and cannot believe, that any incidents in Hitch's plots as we assembled them reflected any obsessions about particular fatal instruments or the like. When we compiled scripts in those days, the deaths, the weapons, the details, the incidents were generally as I have described, contributed by all hands, and accepted collectively with solely dramatic considerations in mind. The *art*, the construction finally chosen, that was Hitch—that was what made them truly creative works. The details might have come from anyone.

Was Hitch a cautious man? Very. His interests were far from limited to films. Art, literature, life and what was going on in the world, travel—he had a passion for working out complicated imaginary trips with time-tables, and real journeys as well. His appetite was for everything because everything might one day come in useful in a film. But his highest ambition was the film and this he would not risk. Did he then have no principles, no humane or ethical or religious ideas which he accounted more important? I would not draw that conclusion. His repeated insistence that for him a film was only entertainment was, I am sure, a defence mechanism, camouflage against impertinent enquiry. He hid his inner self and would not let even an edge of it peep out in his work, lest this should militate against his freedom as a filmmaker.

I always had two maxims about the proper conduct of an AP's job. One was that the better you did it the less you had to do. Prepare the film properly, make up the unit and cast wisely, and you could put your feet up in your office and let everything unroll. Partly, it worked. I had time enough during the Hitchcock adventure to AP other productions, co-direct one, and for much extracurricular activity as well.

Only on the last of our subjects, *Sabotage*, did we meet crisis. For this film we got probably the most accomplished actress we ever had, a star quality at the top of the Hollywood tree: Sylvia Sidney. The trouble was that she was originally a stage actress, who came to the screen from triumph in the New York fringe theatre. She could not piece together in her mind what Hitchcock was after, the meaning of separate shots and how the scene could be constructed from them. She had always acted a scene right through, and she badly needed words, a

single sentence or even a phrase, to start a mood off for her, as a singer needs a note to find the key. In Hitch she met possibly the only director whose methods did not fit at all. We were happy with her work. She felt uncertain and would not be reassured. As befits a great star, she had, in Hollywood fashion, been built a little tent on the Bush studio floor so that she could rest between shots hidden from inquisitive eyes. Many were the times I was called up from my office to find her weeping, in which emergency of course it is the AP's duty to embrace and comfort her as best he can. She was not to be consoled. She wanted to go home.

I persuaded her to stay at least for the big scene. Here, over a meal she has prepared, she learns that her husband has been the cause of the death of her small brother and, half by accident, she kills him. Try this one, I coaxed. Afterwards we would see. The scene contained, alas, barely a word. A real Hitch scene, made up of close-ups and inserts, eyes, expressions, forks, potatoes, cabbages. After playing it as directed, in total unhappiness, she broke down.

'Would you give us,' I begged, 'a few hours more?' I promised she should be the first to see the rough-cut. That night we projected it for her. Hitch, herself, cutter Charles Frend and I were present. The scene is one of the strongest ever contrived by Hitch. Duse could not have played it better. Our star was dazed. As she came out of the projection room she looked at Hitch: 'Hollywood must hear of this,' she said.

The second part of my theory was fatal to me. I held it was the duty of the good AP to act as cushion between company and creator. He must be the defender of the director's needs to the company and likewise the defender of the company's cash to the director. Winding up this picture, Hitch and I once more disagreed. The scene concerned the boy held up in a traffic jam which delays him so that the bomb he is unwittingly carrying goes off. For this Hitch wanted a tram. The shots involved would last about thirty seconds. To make them, we would have to build a concrete base to carry the lines that would carry the tram from the nearest point in the street where it normally passed to the nearest point on the lot where it would have to be filmed. Cost—£3,000. For thirty seconds! I did not think it worth it.

Hitch refused to agree. He thought the tram would imply London to an American audience in a way that a bus could not. Of course he was right. But so may I have been right, in arguing that this scene was so tense it would hardly matter what the background was. Again, I would not quarrel. I asked the appropriate Ostrer brother to release me from the unit. Soon afterwards I was filming the war in Spain with Norman McLaren.

I only saw Hitch once again. He came to London briefly soon after the 39-45 war and entertained Angus MacPhail and myself to supper in his rooms at Claridges. He was as humorous, amiable and affable as ever. A splendid evening. But I never wrote to him in America after the McCarthy days. I was afraid that it might do him harm if I did. ■





'1941': a strong echo of Preston Sturges.

## Spielberg's Custard-Pie

Tom Milne reviews 1941

For Steven Spielberg, *1941* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) has turned out to be a close encounter of the third time which saw him finally go down. Having brought off a magnificent bluff with *Jaws*, he raised the ante and did it again with *Close Encounters*. But with *1941*, critics and audiences were ready and waiting to slap down the puppy whose antics no longer amused, as he merged three historical incidents—the sighting of a Japanese submarine off the Californian coast in 1942, the purely imaginary Great Los Angeles Air Raid two days later, and the riots of 1943 which set outraged servicemen against anti-authoritarian zoot-suiters—into a blockbusting satire on America's jingoistically nervous determination to defend its shores against invasion for the first time since the Civil War. The most expensive comedy ever made, so the general complaint runs, is just not funny.

I beg, while acknowledging that one man's banana-skin may be someone else's sliced onion, to differ up to a point. Many of the film's conceits are enchanting, like the ventriloquist's dummy which shows symptoms of alarm at having spotted the Japanese sub long before its master does, or the giant ferris wheel lit by fairy lights which rolls in stately splendour down a pier and into the sea to intimate to the awed Japanese that they have indeed succeeded in destroying Hollywood. Most of the gags work perfectly on screen, but their effect is cumulative rather than

simply comic. Unlike Mike Nichols' version of *Catch 22*, which frittered away its overall theme by trying to ensure that each sequence worked as a gag or collection of gags in its own right, *1941* rediscovers the method of Joseph Heller's novel, where the comedy became increasingly overlaid by the galloping paranoia, and a peculiarly hideous terror at the horror of war was exposed.

Spielberg's purpose is less serious than Heller's, of course, and is hinted at in his opening sequence, which exactly reprises the beginning of *Jaws*, with the same actress taking an early morning dip, only to be assaulted by a submarine instead of a shark. 'Hollywood!' breathes an ecstatic Japanese sailor, as he looks up to catch a glimpse of her naked flesh overflowing the periscope on which she is precariously perched. It is a lovely opening gag for the film; but also, surely, a wry acknowledgment by Spielberg, as a director who has amply demonstrated his devotion to the Dream Factory by making films which reflect his extensive knowledge of cinema history while revealing little desire for personal statements, that Hollywood's newest superstar is as subject to *kitsch* as the old Hollywood ever was.

The sequence which follows this opening has a teenage jitterbug (Bobby de Cicco) practising a dance routine in the kitchen of his father's hash-house, meanwhile performing an elaborate conjuring act with a friend in which flying plates

gets washed, egg yolks land on the grill, and pancake batter soars through the air. Continuing outside with interference from the customers, the act escalates into a classic custard-pie riot which ends with a hapless soldier getting his face dunked in his own birthday cake. It is a glorious sequence, not because any individual gag is funny (one is hardly given the time to laugh, anyway), but because it is put together with such superlative skill as a choreographic anthology of the old slapstick standbys.

And as the film proceeds at breakneck speed, accumulating specific film references (to *The Quiet Man*, *Dr Strangelove* and *Star Wars*, among others) as well as generalised dialogue clichés ('We sure as hell didn't start this war, but by God we're going to finish it!'), the effect is rather like a drowning nightmare in which the whole of Hollywood, in all its agony and ecstasy, flashes before one's eyes. Most relevant of these references is probably the replay of the scene in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* where a Miss Kockenlocker scathingly discounts the suggestion that anybody could possibly be called Ratzkywatzky. Here Warren Oates, as a mad general by Sterling Hayden out of *Dr Strangelove*, challenges an intruder on his jittery defence post to identify himself. 'Birkhead?' he snaps, 'What kind of a stupid name is that?' ... and promptly details one of his men, Winowski by name, to check out the stranger for stilts in case he is cunningly disguising his diminutive Oriental stature.

The point is that in the Preston Sturges comedies, the extended slapstick sequences—the destruction of the train by the Ale and Quail club in *The Palm Beach Story* is an obvious example—were never particularly funny either. But they were essential to the Sturges vision of a world in which people tried desperately to match up to the image society expected of them, and where their inevitable failure brought inevitable—but not irremediable—disaster as their world collapsed about them. Overcoming their jitters or other incapacities to achieve the heroism that Uncle Sam expects, the assorted citizens of *1941* manage to demolish Hollywood Boulevard and other Californian fringes without anybody getting noticeably hurt. And the humour lies in the incongruity of their enormous effort in achieving derisory results. What is funny about Ward Douglas, say—the Californian Dagwood Bumstead played by Ned Beatty who valiantly tries to sink the sub with an ack-ack gun parked in his garden—is not so much his piece-by-piece demolition of his own home, as the owlish solemnity with which he can envisage no other alternative, and the indomitability with which, when last seen, he is obviously consoling his disconsolate wife with plans for instant rebuilt prosperity.

*1941*, in other words, positively bristles with malice about the American image as propagated through the distorting mirror of American movies. The particular sting in its tail is attached to General Stilwell



(Robert Stack), who plays the voice of reason throughout, stoutly insisting that all rumours of invasion are pure hysteria, and preferring to sit out the phony war in a movie house watching *Dumbo*, smiling fondly as he anticipates all the catchphrases and wiping away a furtive tear as the incarcerated mother elephant manages to cradle her baby in her trunk while singing a lullaby. Joining spiritual hands with him as he harangues the citizens of Los Angeles out of their internecine quarrels and into unity against their common foe, the heroic sergeant (Dan Aykroyd) puts it in a nutshell: 'You think the Krauts believe in Walt Disney?'

1941 is perhaps one of those films that should be seen twice, so that disappointed expectations over the wayward behaviour of the slapstick no longer get in the way of pleasure over what goes on

alongside it. The long dance hall sequence, for example, has been a particular target for critical vitriol, noted only for the way in which it escalates into a tired pastiche of those free-for-all fights in which Ford and Walsh found such delectation. In fact it is one of the best things Spielberg has done: a marvellous treasure-trove of period construction, choreographed with miraculous *brio* and precision timing as the suave bandleader-MC with the live white mouse chained to his lapel starts the ball rolling, three Andrews Sisters lookalikes launch into a mimed rendition of 'Down by the Ohio', and the hair-raisingly energetic jitterbug contest that erupts all over the ballroom gradually degenerates into an equally precision-made brawl. It is something of an apotheosis, and to my mind more brilliantly directed than all of *Jaws* and *Close Encounters* put together. □

## Idiots First

Richard Combs reviews *Being There*

If the perfect fool of Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, who seems to rise by sheer weightlessness to the highest office in the land, has a predecessor in the comic literature of the United States, it is probably the billionaire prankster of Terry Southern's *The Magic Christian*. Southern's Guy Grand and Kosinski's Chance ('Chauncey Gardiner') are ostensibly as different as night and day, but what they exemplify, in respectively active and passive fashion, is the gullibility of the public and the fallibility of its egalitarian doctrine that any man can be President—and/or rich, powerful and famous. The grand-daddy of them both, perhaps, is the Great Gatsby—the romantic apotheosis of the myth of the man who came from nowhere to make it big, but who remains an enigma, a blank, the man who has everything but the one thing he wants (which is where the movies, and *Citizen Kane*, come in).

That both Chance and Grand should be played on the screen by Peter Sellers is, of course, another connection. That Sellers, apparently, should have been eager to play Kosinski's non-hero since the book's first publication in 1971 suggests even more curious intertwinings of actor and persona, of comic type and national stereotype. *Being There* would be an inconceivable comedy in an English setting, where a perfectly unconscious impostor like Chance—his blank seeming challenges others to define his being—would have to become a conscious artificer of the tics of class. Yet for Sellers, the English mime of a thousand such faces and mannerisms, the *tabula rasa* of Chance represents some ultimate refinement of the mimic's art. Wholly restricted in gesture, expression and intonation, Chance is simply the reflection of what he sees (or is shown by television), a minimal personality containing everything and nothing.

Given the terse, elliptical way Kosinski

tells his story, it might have been created for just such an acting exercise. It is a one-joke enterprise—how a man who says nothing, does nothing, is nothing can seem immensely important and powerful—which the author resists over-playing by never quite delivering. The sequence of events by which Chance comes to this position is so outrageous, and so little justified in narrative terms, that the result is less a story than a playfully extreme hypothesis which a behaviourist might have doodled for his own amusement. Chance, we are asked to accept, is a retarded foundling who grows to adulthood knowing only his own quarters in the house where he has been taken in, the garden he tends, and the television he otherwise watches constantly. With the death of his patron, the Old Man, he is forced to leave house and garden; he is immediately involved in an accident and taken into the home of a powerful but dying financier and his much younger wife, where he is soon

meeting the President, the press, diplomats and industrialists. His one topic of conversation, how to make a garden grow, and his placid response to every situation—having no self to reveal, he simply acts out what he has seen on television—are soon taken as evidence of some secret political wisdom and power. Such an ideal embodiment of consensus politics is destined, the ending implies, for the White House.

Hal Ashby's *Being There* (ITC) from time to time looks in danger of giving too much weight to this slender fable, of elaborating its sarcastic 'what if' into sententious satire. To begin with, it must be practically unique, as an adaptation which has tried to remain completely faithful to its source (Kosinski also wrote the script), in finding it necessary to amplify the original, to add material rather than prune it, in order to fill out a two hour-plus running time. The story has also been relocated from New York to Washington to heighten, in the words of a *New York Times* interview, 'the identification with political power'.

The additions are scrupulously in keeping, and usefully tease some humour out of the bald absurdity of the premise. Chance, for instance, is now allowed to wander for a while in the outside world, before his accident and his second immurement, blankly making the acquaintance of the crumbling city's flora and fauna. What principally keeps the story to its one-track course is Sellers' one-note performance, which steadfastly refuses to tip the wink to the audience as he amiably soaks up TV images and as amiably fields them back to his baffled interlocutors, equally one-note characters here judiciously fleshed out as stars: Melvyn Douglas and Shirley MacLaine as the ailing financier and his frustrated wife; Jack Warden as the gruffly uncharismatic President.

If Sellers seems to have become symbiotically involved in the character, one should also count Kosinski lucky in having found Ashby as director. Although the novel's political environment is East Coast, there is something about the Californian languor of Ashby's direction which suits its comic vision. There are undeniably two sides to Ashby's personality, which perhaps hover in uneasy alliance over *Being There*: the spaced-out humorist of *Harold and Maude*, headed for the acid observation of *The Last Detail*, and the blandly liberal commentator of *Shampoo* and *Coming Home*, pushing (or rather ambling after) the big statement. What holds them together here is probably Ashby's most focused talent, his editorial control. The result must be one of the boldest of commercial comedies, for the way it turns on passages of dead time, the dreadful pauses while other characters struggle to see the significance in each of Chance's cryptically meaningless remarks. Ashby, in fact, has so palpably created a mood to fit the stark outline of Kosinski's world that he makes one realise how uninhabitable, and fruitless, that world is, even in its brief fictional span. □



Peter Sellers in 'Being There'.



## A World beyond Freud

Jan Dawson reviews

### *Working Title: Journeys from Berlin/1971*

At first glance, there is little about Yvonne Rainer's new film to recall her origins as a choreographer and dancer. Its most spectacular leaps are those of the troubled intellect; its visual style is deliberately—and oppressively—bleak. To the extent that, for at least the first of its two hours (or until its methods and structures have revealed themselves and authoritatively asserted their own correctness), her latest work appears closer to an over-researched term-paper than to any conventional definition of a film.

Not only the title is tentative. Taking as her point of departure the *notion* of a precise time and place (the film itself was made in 1979, in New York, London and Berkeley, as well as in Berlin), Yvonne Rainer embarks on a series of free-associative journeys from the topic of terrorism which dominated the Berlin/1971 of her title. Avoiding both the black and white sensationalism of its treatment by the press and the dramatic, cops-and-robbers element which has thus far emerged from attempts to flirt with the theme in a fictional form, she reflectively sets out to investigate parallels and precedents in both 'public' events and private experiences and to explore—not simplify—her subject's contradictions. The predominantly static camerawork is richly compensated by the series of arabesques and ellipses which Rainer weaves around her subject; and if each subsequent arc lifts her a little further above the ground fog which normally shrouds it, she none the less returns each time to her starting point. Equally—and to vary the imagery—one might describe the film's structure as a series of journeys along the radial spokes of a wheel, each one starting again from the hub.

For the preposition in the title is a crucial indicator. The journeys from the Berlin of 1971, from Baader, Meinhof (especially the latter), Raspe and Ensslin, lead her backwards in time to nineteenth century America (Alexander Berkman's account of his assassination attempt against Henry Clay Frick in 1892), to Emma Goldman, Angelica Balabanoff, Vera Figner: the 'Russian Amazons' whose own homicidal acts of protest against the state were also a certain—if headily exalted—form of suicide, more lucidly and consciously embraced than any of the ambiguous deaths in Stammheim.

One major difference between the historical memoirs and Rainer's (and our own) experience of history occurring in the present tense is that the former acts of violence have, with time, assumed the incontrovertible, monolithic semblance of the past. As the American male voice, seen but not heard in political and domestic discussion with his equally invisible girl friend, observes: 'These things all happened a hundred years ago, and the

memoirs you've been reading were written thirty to forty years later. Things like violence get a lot more palatable at that distance.' A second, more serious qualitative difference is that the illuminating vision of an improved future which sustained the Russian dissidents in their extremist rejections of state power seems generally to be withheld from their present-day German counterparts—and from the film-maker. Where Vera Figner could draw strength from 'that contrast between a radiant future for the people and our own sad fate', the depressive patient whose far-ranging stream of consciousness provides the bulk of the film's text can only assert, 'I would rather focus on the tolerable present than think about the terrible future.'

For paralleling the parallels from public life of a hundred years ago, and extending her equation between homicidal acts of protest and suicide, Rainer employs an extended 'therapy session' to evoke—in the intimate, confessional mode—the myriad daily experiences of power and repression, and the small-scale mutinies against them, which lie close to the surface of a socially acquiescent 'private' life. Especially a female one. As the suicidal patient drones on (recited into camera by Annette Michelson with a grimly determined lack of softening charm), the artificiality of the distinction between public and private domains grows ever more absurd. If, on the one hand, the patient is so locked within her private frustrations that she apparently fails to notice that her therapist is sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, some-

times a child; if, similarly, she fails to notice the invasion of her private space (in fact, a cleverly begloomed White-chapel Gallery) by shadowy, and occasionally sinister, groupings of other people, it none the less fast emerges that the sources of her unrelenting woe as frequently arise in the political arena as in the domestic one.

Her litany of lament for the atrophy of her feelings (and not least for a lost faculty of compassion) links, too, to the images which accompany some of the readings by the radically concerned couple in New York: images, from a moving train, of a landscape deserted of people, and dominated by signs of human poverty and industrial prosperity; views from apartment windows, in Berlin and New York, of streets seemingly serving more for the convenience of machines than for the comfort of their human occupants. These views from stationary and moving windows, themselves reflecting Rainer's subjective experience of her polyglot life as an artist, also provide an objective expression of what Emma Goldman termed 'the wholesale violence of capital and government', in comparison with which she saw political acts of violence as 'but a drop in the ocean'.

The sense which the film evokes of the interchangeability of contemporary places (at least, urban western ones) is reinforced by the presence of yet another disembodied voice on the soundtrack: that of an American female adolescent, reading from her diary about a life far removed from 'intense dramas' yet periodically shaken by a violent frisson before the outward signs of strong sentiments or intense dramas in other lives.

Yet the interchangeability of the banal and the dramatic is further illustrated in another of the film's sets of images. At intervals, the camera travels slowly along



*'Working Title: Journeys from Berlin/1971'.*



the cluttered mantelpiece of what we assume to be the room of the unseen New York couple. The sudden appearance on it, among the domestic bric-à-brac and 10 by 8 glossies of cultural heroines, of a steaming mound of spaghetti—presumably part of the meal which the couple are preparing while debating the moral complexities of the century—produces its own surrealist frisson worthy of Magritte. Later, the effect is reversed, to more sobering effect: a pair of pliers, already seen among the domestic debris, shed their banality when re-observed after the soundtrack's female voice has quoted a torture victim in Iran: 'The burns on my feet are all infected and the pliers used on me have left nasty gashes.'

A more obtrusive variant of the same effect is provided by the recurring black and white footage of a man and woman walking around both one another and the exterior of the pagoda-like façade of a recognisable Berlin building. Besides providing a virtuoso demonstration of motion-editing and match cutting (and thus a pointed reminder that Rainer's chosen medium is indeed film), this footage underlines the adaptability of

content to context. In their studiously choreographed strolls, the girl appears most probably to be a terrorist awaiting a contact, the man alternately as the awaited contact and a plain-clothes investigator. Their behaviour is unsettling because it is at once banal and formalised; interestingly, the paranoid associations conjured up by the stream of ideas from the soundtrack allows the audience little possibility of considering their motions as innocent exercise.

Throughout the film, there is one other image that grows more unambiguously recognisable each time it recurs: a circling, aerial view of Stonehenge. Like much in the film, its significance remains at first elusive. Gradually, its connection—with monolithic power systems and their architectural expression—makes itself felt. Like the other spaces which Rainer intermittently reveals, it appears to offer little room for the kind of conscious moral choice which all her 'characters'—from the suicidal patient, to Meinhof, to the New York girl summoned to jury service and suddenly sensing that 'someone's life might be in my hands'—somewhat nostalgically seek.

Rainer's collage of contemporary

impressions, juxtaposing theoretically grounded actions with the practical trivia of uncleaned refrigerators and unappeased guilt complexes, builds to the frightening portrait of a social machine powerful enough to make individual differences utterly meaningless. If she avoids even tentatively suggesting that acts against the machine may be equally meaningless (for this is a film which explores the causes of terrorism without evaluating the results), she none the less forcefully imposes her sense of historical moments and movements autonomous of their individual components: 'Angelica Balabanoff was the youngest of nine children. Olga Liubatovich's mother died when she was an adolescent. Elizaveta Kovalskaia's mother was a serf. Emma Goldman's father beat her. Veraigner had elegance, education, intelligence, and the ability to conduct herself properly in all social circles. Vera Zasulich's father never sat her on his knee...'

Indeed, Yvonne Rainer's film might equally be called *Journeys from Vienna*, so totally does it suggest a world whose explanations, no matter with what individual anguish we experience it, have definitively passed beyond Freud. □

## Lookin' at Country

John Pym reviews *Coal Miner's Daughter*

Michael Apted is no stranger to the pitfalls of the music picture. His 1974 film *Stardust*, scripted by Ray Connolly, followed the all-too-predictable fortunes of a 60s pop idol, Jim MacLaine, played by David Essex, who at the end emerges from premature retirement only to expire from a drug-overdose in the very act of giving an exclusive, tell-all television interview.

*Coal Miner's Daughter* (CIC), forthrightly based on the autobiography of country-music queen Loretta Lynn ('You Ain't Man Enough to Take My Man', 'You're Lookin' at Country'), seems on the surface to contain material no more prepossessing than that of the earlier film. This time, however, Apted's ambitions are not weighted by the need (or his scriptwriter's need) to propound general truths: Jim MacLaine's fate was, in one sense, a self-conscious summary of the soured 'spirit of the 60s'; Loretta Lynn's low-keyed rise to stardom really stands for nothing; the apparently genial face of the country-music business conceals, as we all know, an unquestionably stony heart, but Loretta remains ('true' or not, it doesn't greatly matter) largely separate and very much her own woman.

The kernel of the pleasure afforded by *Coal Miner's Daughter* is an old-fashioned star performance, Sissy Spacek, as Loretta, maturing from her early teens to the edge of middle age, which seamlessly conceals the hard work behind a practised, unstereotyped ease of manner. Allied to this performance, which is backed almost uniformly by

others of equal conviction, is the gratifying exposition: success comes to Loretta not as it first came to Jim MacLaine through the efforts of hustling middlemen, but rather despite the middlemen, through perseverance, a uniquely American populist grit.

In Apted's acute, rather distantly handsome recreation of post-war Kentucky (where Loretta Webb was born into a large, tight, Appalachian family) and Washington state (whence her husband subsequently summons her)—one hesitates to say that it is an 'outsider's' view, but there is something of this in the film's tone—matters are governed by a finely judged sense of process. Loretta, who at thirteen marries a raunchy but correctly behaved ex-serviceman, 'Doo-little' Lynn (Tommy Lee Jones), has first to grow up, to bear four children and find her own identity, before her songs—she sings about the house to Doo's pleasure, and it is he who eventually shoe-horns her into a career—begin to take on any validity.

The film has its share of clichés, though they are in this case perhaps the clichés of daily life rather than those of the genre. Loretta inevitably finds the strains of Grand Ole Opry stardom too unbearably disruptive and inevitably resorts to surreptitious pills; the film does not shrink from her full-blown on-stage confessional breakdown before an audience half sympathetic, half gratifyingly aghast. And yet, reminders though these remain of the narrative's locked-in banality, Tom Rickman's script for the most part successfully diverts attention



Appalachian family: Loretta Lynn (Sissy Spacek), her mother and father.

by concentrating on the engaging, subtly modulated ups-and-downs of Doo and Loretta's marriage.

The manner in which both of them alter and grow mutually, imperceptibly dependent, and the gradual reversal of their roles—when Loretta begins to earn big money, Doo takes a job as a mechanic to preserve something of his own identity; subsequently, however, he acknowledges this as a slightly bogus livelihood and quietly adapts to the role of house-husband—are rendered with affecting and authentic understatement. There is an unfussy quality about the vicissitudes of this marriage which rings if not absolutely true then much more nearly so than one might have expected.



Although to sophisticated city folk (on both sides of the Atlantic) the sentiments behind the lyrics of Loretta's songs may appear to have sprung from a sort of calculated cornball ingenuousness, part of the strength of Apted's uncondescending portrait is actually to make these sentiments comprehensible. When one has seen the clothes worn by the children of a poor mining family in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky, in the late 40s, the curled, impeccable stetson and the shining white boots and fringed costume worn by Loretta at the start of her career registers less as vulgar overdressing (and the gar-

ish evening wear in which she subsequently appears acts as a similar indicator) and more the exact reflection of what she tries to convey by her songs.

*Coal Miner's Daughter*, however, belongs to Sissy Spacek, and in a smaller way to Beverly D'Angelo, who plays Patsy Cline, Loretta's friend and erstwhile country-music 'rival'. Both sing their hearts out with infectious application. It is hard not to like them in a way that has nothing (or at least very little) to do with a fan's sense of adored identification. Jim MacLaine's fate elicited no such response. □



'Bloody Kids': Peter Clark, Richard Thomas on the school roof.

## Young Pretenders

Paul Madden reviews *Bloody Kids*

*Bloody Kids* is quite simply the best television movie I've seen. With its usual reticence where TV movies are concerned, *TV Times* omitted the name of the production company from the credit listings. *Bloody Kids* is the first genuine product of ATV's Black Lion Films (that's to discount *Dirty Money*, transmitted for convenience under its banner), a company sitting uneasily between ITC—ATV's entertainment film-making arm—and the television station itself. It brings together three of the most interesting talents to emerge in British television drama in the last ten years: producer Barry Hanson, director Stephen Frears, and writer Stephen Poliakoff. Hanson (who produced *Gangsters*, *The Naked Civil Servant* and the series *Out*) has worked separately and successfully with Frears and Poliakoff in the past.

The general theme is commonplace enough, the alienation of the young, the stuff of newspaper headlines; and familiar too from Poliakoff's own *Hitting Town* and *City Sugar*, disturbing dramas of urban pressure adapted to TV. But it's

never been quite so stunningly realised as here. Into a 'dark urban landscape' lit only by the flashing lights of police cars, the strobes of the disco and the neon of amusement arcades stumble two of the young young, to star in a drama of their own creation where everyone else is merely an overworked extra.

The film opens with the aftermath of an accident. It's a place of lights and noise and confusion and in the midst of it all a policeman takes time out and holds his head, a faint clue to the inability of adults to cope with their monstrous world. But an 11-year-old boy can wander there apparently with impunity, at one moment darting beneath a lorry hoisted high by a crane, as he escapes with the police chief's hat. After this minor triumph the boy, Leo, decides to stage his own drama with himself and friend Mike as leading players—a mock fight and stabbing with plenty of blood after a football match—a joke because, as he tells Mike, 'There's no law against jokes.' It works—all too well—as Leo is really stabbed, albeit accidentally, when

the boys go for each other before a bemused crowd of football spectators. The latter are by chance genuine, which gives the scene a certain edge, as unreality becomes reality. From this casually contrived scuffle the drama flows inevitably, if not quite as Leo intended.

After the brilliantly suggested eeriness of its opening (reinforced by the discordance of George Fenton's music), the film lapses almost into the conventional with Leo's (and Mike's) schooldays, complete with school bully. In retrospect this is a necessary contrast to the sensational narrative to follow. Life, that is Leo's life, begins to imitate the ubiquitous spectacle of television. The school security man's portable telly shows his fictional counterpart battling with villains. Nurses and policemen stand round a hospital set watching yet another police/hospital series. As Leo, covered in blood, is pushed on a trolley to the examination room, white fluorescent lights flashing by, to the portentous music of the spaghetti Western, the doctor confides in low tones, 'Going to have to sew you up.' It's an almost humorous confirmation of his expectations, fuelled by the clichés of TV soap opera. He can truly bask in the light he floods over himself.

Meanwhile Mike is being treated to the sights and sounds of Southend on a Saturday night in the company of Ken (Gary Holton), urban cowboy and car-thief. In the words of the unobtrusive song on the café juke-box, later reprised over the closing credits, he's 'on the run'. Two action set-pieces stand out—Ken steals a BMW and with Mike installed as passenger beats the police surveillance camera in the high street, crazily weaving in and out of the bollards in the shopping arcade. 'Bit slow these boys ... c'mon take us,' he shouts. It's a reminder of the camera covering the police station which Leo has earlier escaped. In another stolen car Ken 'buzzes' a double-decker bus full of punks which Mike has boarded, then climbs on to its roof and jumps off.

Throughout, Chris Menges' camera just looks at Leo and Mike, as they themselves stare out on a world gone mad: cool and deadpan, authentic heirs of the future. (Newcomers Richard Thomas and Peter Clark are perfect as the boys.) 'Christ—they're really beginning to make me feel old,' says a blonde punkette. But Leo is disappointed—he smashes a hospital TV set (paralleling Ken's smashing of a shop-front full of televisions). Unlike their images, they (the police) 'don't know what they're doing'. They should have seen it was a joke, but they didn't. Leo triggers the apocalypse by pressing a fire alarm. The doors of the hospital lift in which he and Mike have descended open on to a vision of hell, a fantastic chaos through which move the walking wounded, nurses, doctors, patients, policemen, injured football supporters, and firemen. The film has come full circle. Calmly Leo and Mike pick a path through the chaos and, isolated, light cigarettes; the film freezes. Children of the damned they may be, but they will survive. □



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## John Houseman's second lap

FRONT AND CENTER

by John Houseman

Simon & Schuster, New York/

\$15.00

The 70s have been honeyed for John Houseman: he won a supporting actor Oscar in *The Paper Chase*, and then turned that literate, academic and elitist story into one of the least likely network television successes. He was not in the least daunted by playing a mandarin of the Harvard Law School; but he spread awe and respect around him, like a butler who has more grace than his masters. Every one of his admirers must have rejoiced in the late and unexpected flowering and in the ease with which acting joined his other talents.

But some of us fretted. *Run-Through*, his first volume of autobiography, was published in 1972, when he was seventy. With so much fresh living on his hands, Houseman might have had no time for the written life. For the moment, we have been reassured: *Front and Center* carries us on from the time of Pearl Harbor to *Lust for Life*. It is a worthy sequel, even if the events it describes are less momentous than those of the first volume. John Houseman, after Mercury, is revealed as more than just an observer of great history. He is so fluent that 500 pages seem greased for rapid reading. He has moments of gossip as sharp as Pepys, and the same attention to well-being. More intriguing, he has the flourish and bravado of a man who was always insecure. Houseman would be less of an actor and author if he was not as generous and artful a fraud. You cannot remember so much without the shaping disposition of a story-teller. And you cannot make your life so busy without the kind of trepidation that Houseman acknowledges in himself. He never fully explains or explores it; he does not seem a man too interested in depth. But without that sense of worry he would never have become so worldly or suave.

In the era of *Run-Through*, Houseman was in the shadow of the dynamic but younger Orson Welles, so that he may never have been sure of his own achievement. As *Front and Center* begins he is in the interesting position of being invited to head Overseas Radio Programming for the new Foreign Information Service—to produce the Voice of America—despite being, technically, an enemy alien expressly forbidden to go near short-wave radios.

He kept mum and was soon



John Houseman in 'Old Boyfriends'.

supervising several hundred broadcasts a week. Houseman evidently loved the creative comradeship, even if he admits difficulty in entirely identifying with the war. Rumanian, then French, then British, and only finally American in 1943, he is most rooted in theatre and performance. *The Paper Chase* would be so much more than respectable soap opera if anyone appreciated Houseman enough to see that the magisterial façade of his character ought to be hiding bogusness.

As it is, Houseman is as serene an upstart as Charles Foster Kane, with the same suspicious expansiveness, the same amiable coldness, but with none of the bad temper. Before the war was anywhere near over, Houseman had gone to Paramount as a producer. He began very tentatively there until the great coup of *The Blue Dahlia*. This is a highlight of the book, for scriptwriter Raymond Chandler (Dulwich) and Houseman (Clifton) were from the same kind of B+ public school. They shared a taste for decorous manners and racy style. Chandler could only finish the script by going on a calculated and well-organised drunk, a plan that threw Houseman into a panic: 'Such is my own insecurity that contact with a human brain that is even slightly out of control frightens, repels and finally enrages me.'

Which only indicates the perverse strategy of a man who worked not only with Chandler but with a Welles who ended up hurling abuse and dish heaters at him, with Charles Laughton, Max Ophuls, Vincente Minnelli, Fritz Lang, Marlon Brando—most of them in the crowded years from 1945 to 1955. Not to mention Nicholas Ray. Houseman recruited Ray in wartime radio, fostered his career, and produced his shattering debut, *They Live by Night*. There is a page in *Front and Center*, on Ray's complex nature, that is piercingly thorough: 'He was a potential homosexual with a deep, passion-

ate and constant need for female love in his life. This made him attractive to women, for whom the chance to save him from his own self-destructive habits proved an irresistible attraction of which Nick took full advantage and for which he rarely forgave them.'

Not enough of the book has that balance of affection and insight. There are bland lists of names and parties, and just a little too much grease in the prose sometimes. But these are the years that established Houseman's prodigious energy and tact as a producer. The human understanding of men like Ray surely helps explain the quality of Houseman's work, just as his memory of Joan Fontaine is the essence of his delicate wit. They were lovers who nearly married. Joan claims that only the intrusion of Houseman's mother impeded the match, and it is proper to add that he scarcely mentions her. He does tell us about Joan, however:

'Miss Fontaine has graciously testified that she found me a satisfying lover. I take this opportunity to return the compliment. She was an adorable mistress—childish, sweet-smelling, elegant, calculating, sophisticated, lecherous, innocent and faithless. I believe she found in my company a temporary refuge from the hard-faced producers who made passes at her and from the handsome British actor whom she had recently divorced. She also saw in her affair with me a sure way to exasperate her sister, my friend Olivia de Havilland.'

That is passable Evelyn Waugh, and worth the whole of Fontaine's book *No Bed of Roses*. Yet it is not so cruel that Fontaine wouldn't laugh herself. Let me add that the love affair was over several years before Fontaine gave her greatest performance in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, one of several masterpieces to which the name John Houseman is attached.

DAVID THOMSON

## Yesterday's news

MAKING THE NEWS

by Peter Golding and

Philip Elliott

Longman/£14.50

In this age of supposedly instant knowledge and instant communication it sometimes appears that all forms of composition and all genres of information are approximating to the condition of journalism. Ideas whistle around the globe. Learned investigators converge at frequent international conferences, computerise their findings, circulate them via specialist data-bases and word processors. There are, however, two elements which stubbornly refuse to be drawn towards this vortex of global instantaneity: empirical sociology and book publishing impose delays which, by the standards of the day, are laughably laggard, crippling manual, damagingly cautious. They encourage the fascinating questions of one decade to be met by the already trite responses of the next. They reduce research projects, painstakingly funded in one intellectual era, to a state of belated obviousness.

Such, at least, has been the fate of this thin volume, long-awaited by the community of those concerned with the examination of broadcasting. The Centre for Mass Communications Research at Leicester University was conceived of this project when the last students of the 1960s were still storming across the last untrampled campuses of the Midlands, but was not brought to bed of it until this day. The intention has been to examine, in sociologists' terms, the constraints and demands of television news and the work was funded by the International Broadcast Institute (even the name has now been changed to the more fashionable term 'communications'); research was undertaken in Ireland, Sweden and Nigeria in the early 70s and was written up while, in Britain, Lord Annan sat upon the chieftain's stool of broadcasting investigation. Only in the high summer of 1980, when the whole centre of concern has shifted, has the work finally appeared between boards, and even now at a price which seems guaranteed to retard further circulation.

As one might expect, it reads fascinatingly for the archaeologist of ideas who cares to burrow through the layers of discarded and reformulated topics, mostly scantily addressed, of which the book consists. Remarkably, the two writers have managed deftly to introduce allusions to whole issues which have arisen only since their investigations were



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conducted, such as the social construction of reality, the imbalances in the north-south flows of information, the 'bias against understanding' and other formulas and critiques which have seized attention over the years. Indeed, in fairness, it must be pointed out that both writers have been prominent in these more contemporary discussions even though their work has persisted in not appearing.

*Making the News* is an enquiry into the methods and practices of three national television newsrooms in widely different societies. The newsrooms concerned have, of course, been thoroughly transformed in recent years and it is difficult for even the most patient reader to maintain attention in the affairs of small bureaucracies which are known to be no longer extant. The concluding section of the book does indeed provide a good summary of the contemporary critique of news and of its inherent constraints; the authors list its reliance on prominent personalities, its dependence on the most broadly held social values and assumptions, and the way in which its very instantaneity deprives it of the sense of social process—'evacuating history'. Broadcast news provides a view of the continuities of power which are excessively drawn towards the perspective of a social élite, which are truncated, so to speak, by the absence of a view of the origins of issues and which are excessively personalised and substantially abstracted from their institutional nexus. It is a pity the writers did not decide to jump at just one theme and hammer away at it. We go through the whole thing in a hop-skip-and-jump.

Inevitably broadcasting is going to continue to attract the attention of researchers as it passes from its present technological basis to the multi-technology transmission of the future. Inevitably it will, and should, attract to itself the kinds of critique which are fashionable from moment to moment in the worlds of sociology, anthropology, political science. It is interesting in itself and valuable in the insights it can provide to the processes of society in general, as well as providing material for theorists and system-builders. But work such as this does raise the question of whether centres of mass communication research are any longer what is required. Leicester, after an enormous period of time, has failed to make at all clear what it stands for and what it proposes should be done to improve the mass communications over which it claims the right of purview. The fresh issues and questions have been thrown up in general not by people who have settled down to 'mass communications' but by individuals who have wandered from discipline to discipline or who are

using the phenomenon of broadcasting to illustrate some theory of their own, or to help develop some quite separate subject.

It is possible to construct a specialism out of anything at all. But why do so? Why pretend that the slight but laborious task which has been conducted in this present book is in any way more enduring than a piece of intelligent journalism composed by someone who has taken a look at the social theories of the time? It is more ephemeral than a piece by Bernard Levin and no less prejudiced, in its own way. By deliberately employing research techniques which take longer one is not excused for being irrelevant or old hat. It is not the task of universities to delay knowledge. It is not proper for research institutes to obfuscate the processes of common observation. The longer the world is expected to wait for an answer, the greater is the obligation to provide something worth waiting for. In this case the answer has been a lemon, squeezed until it squeaks.

ANTHONY SMITH

## The Korda Clan

### CHARMED LIVES

by Michael Korda

Allen Lane/£7.95

The author of books entitled *Male Chauvinism!*, *Power!* and *Success!* seems a likely person to chronicle the 'charmed lives' of the three Hungarian-born Korda brothers, whose eccentric personalities, film-making talent and financial wizardry were to dominate the British film industry for the better part of three decades. Add to this the fact that Michael Korda is the son of one of the brothers, Vincent, and thus the nephew of Alexander and Zoltan, and one must admit that his credentials for this particular task are impeccable.

Born on the night *The Private Life of Henry VIII* opened, the author is unable, sadly for us, to give his personal insights into the first decade of the Kordas' stay in Britain, likewise the thirty years which preceded it, but from the war years onwards, and especially after 1945, we are provided with a fascinating, close-up description of the private and public lives of the family. Michael Korda writes with great clarity and obvious facility, and although the book often slips backwards and forwards in time, he is careful to anchor everything in just the right amount of historical context.

As the subtitle 'A Family Romance' implies, *Charmed Lives* does not offer itself as a film historian's reference book. Michael Korda's film scholarship

is adequate given the parameters he has chosen, but there are only a few attempts in a book of almost 500 pages to analyse the Korda brothers' contribution to film in general and the British film industry in particular. He is content to give as much space (forty pages) to one summer holiday he spent with his famous uncle as he does to the entire 'Golden Age' of Korda's film-making from 1933 to 1938. 'It would be tedious,' he writes, 'except to those few people devoted to the history of British films in the thirties, to comment in detail on the entire production schedule of London Films in this period...' As one of the 'few', I would have liked to know his views on those films.

I don't share his opinion that *That Hamilton Woman* (*Lady Hamilton*) was Alex Korda's best directorial effort, but I do appreciate his analysis of why he feels it is: 'There is an emotional vacuum in many of his films, an unwillingness to face the larger human problems, to reduce them by means of charm and humour in order to make them bearable. Something of his own pain is discernible in *Rembrandt*, and its failure at the box-office made him shy away from tragic emotions... until the combination of war, his own relationship with Merle (Oberon) and the love affair between Larry Olivier and Vivien Leigh somehow liberated his own feelings sufficiently for him to make *That Hamilton Woman*, in which there are glimpses of true passion and tragedy.'

I am, however, grateful, for what Michael Korda has given us, for ultimately it is in his ability to capture in anecdote, incident and insight the true characters of the Korda brothers and their relationships to their retinue of wives, children, chauffeurs and nannies that this book excels. Mr Korda dissects with great compassion the brothers' avoidance of family intimacy, their antipathy to things 'chi-chi' (including fancy food, tea at the Ritz, all jewelry for men, most pastry, small dogs and umbrellas), Alex's dislike of real estate (in a crisis you should be able to carry your wealth with you), Vincent's appalling driving and total disregard of sartorial etiquette, and Zoltan's pugnaciousness and hypochondria. His sympathetic but incisive portraits make us appreciate such thumbnail sketches as 'it was said that when Vincent was silent he was sleeping, when Zoli was silent he was sulking, but when Alex was silent he was thinking.' What emerges is a love story involving three men who despite their different tastes, politics and priorities could never totally break free of the bond between them, a bond manufactured and controlled by Alex, the eldest.

Alexander Korda takes centre stage for most of the book, and it is perhaps because of his 'Auntie Mame' relationship to the young

Michael that the book is so peppered with his words of wisdom: 'Always go to the best hotel and eat at the best restaurants—and sooner or later someone will appear who will give you money.' For those interested in following in his footsteps—and there have been and still are many trying to—this book gives a good account of how Alex Korda persuaded people to invest in companies that he would then control, how he succeeded so often, and why he failed so often as well. For those more interested in the private details, we get the first, first-hand description of his last marriage to the much younger Canadian Alexa Boycun, of his last years spent working too hard, relaxing too seldom on his yacht, and of his death and the bitter legal battles which followed it. We also begin to understand why the Korda film empire was wound up after his death, why the dynasty didn't continue.

The last chapter, devoted to Michael's own venture into Hungary during the 1956 Revolution, is perhaps anti-climactic, but understandable in that it was only there that he himself was able to break free of the Korda mythology. It is a tribute to the strength of that mythology that he should have been drawn to it again over twenty years later.

KAROL KULIK

## The King of Nice

### REX INGRAM, MASTER OF THE SILENT CINEMA

by Liam O'Leary

Academy Press, Dublin/£12.50

Liam O'Leary wrote his book on Rex Ingram fifteen years ago, and publisher after publisher rejected it. Who, they asked, would buy a book on an unknown director? While books on far more famous directors were relegated to the remainder stores, O'Leary kept his project alive, adding new information, correcting errors. At last an Irish publisher, the Academy Press, has had the courage to bring it out. And historians can gain the benefit of those unwarded years of work.

With excellent timing, the publication coincided with the Sense of Ireland Festival. For Ingram was born in Ireland, the son of a Protestant clergyman. He emigrated to America in 1911, and after a few years as an actor and scenario-writer he rose to become one of the most respected directors of the entire silent era. 'His break into the cinema,' says O'Leary, 'is reminiscent of the young Orson Welles, for Rex directed his first film from his own script at the age of twenty-three.' If he is remembered today,



# BOOK REVIEWS

however, it is for *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. And that only because of Valentino. Ingram brought Valentino to stardom; when Valentino left Metro, Ingram created another sensation—Ramon Novarro. He also made a star of Alice Terry, whom he later married. Yet the true star of all Ingram pictures was Rex Ingram, in the sense that DeMille was the star of his.

Ingram had a decisive influence on other film-makers. David Lean said, 'The man who really got me going was Rex Ingram ... In everything he did the camerawork was impeccable.' Michael Powell started his career at the Ingram studios. When the Telluride Film Festival offered him a retrospective, he insisted that it contained a tribute to Ingram. He introduced *Scaramouche* with these words: 'From Ingram I learned standards I hope I have never forgotten. They have cost me dear, but it was worth it.'

Ingram was an artist—he studied sculpture under Lee Lawrie—and he had a highly developed visual sense. This caused him acute pain when he was forced to work with a routine cameraman. Fortunately, he quickly formed a partnership with the great John Seitz, whose standards were equally exalted. Unhappily, those Ingram films that survive have inevitably been copied and recopied. A poor dupe of an Ingram film should be thrown away, for it bears no more relation to the look of the original than a Polaroid of an El Greco.

Like the other great pictorialists, Maurice Tourneur and Josef von Sternberg, Ingram was less interested in drama than in mood. Michael Powell was convinced that he was fascinated by the theatre, and critics have often referred to his 'rich theatricality'. His films had none of the cinematic pyrotechnics of Gance or Eisenstein; they were restrained in their treatment, theatrical in the best sense. But he worked into his frame such rich details, such bizarre characters, such subtle lighting, that for the audience of the time, every shot carried an emotional power. They had never seen anything like Ingram's work. In his obsession with character—the character of the setting as well as that of the cast—Ingram suggests Fellini.

And Ingram's films have suffered over the years in rather the same way as Fellini's. The elements that once seemed so fresh and daring have become absorbed into the everyday run of motion pictures, and the originals no longer seem so startling.

Ingram also had a great deal in common with Erich von Stroheim. Both men were obsessed with authenticity, and both went to such lengths to achieve it that producers thought them mad. If Stroheim rejected the backlot and took his company to San Francisco, using real interiors for *Greed* instead of a studio stage, Ingram rejected California altogether. He derived little satisfaction from rebuilding Europe out of plasterboard. He had the attitude of a documentary film-maker, and eventually left Hollywood and took over the Victorine Studios at Nice. 'Whether I tell people they are on the Marseilles waterfront, inside a German submarine, in Baghdad or the Sahara desert, I want them to accept my statement without question; something they will never do when they know that my Sahara was in Bakersfield, my Marseilles waterfront was built at Venice, California ...'

Ingram's studio was a focal point for Europe's artistic community, and O'Leary includes photographs of Ingram with Matisse and George Bernard Shaw. There were those who felt his initials stood for Rex Imperator. If his enemies found him arrogant and hard to deal with, those enemies were invariably producers, trying to impose system on intuition. Ingram had one pet hate—shared by von Stroheim and another Irish director, Marshall Neilan—Louis B. Mayer. Although he made his films for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Ingram refused to have that third name on his pictures; his opening titles announced 'Metro-Goldwyn Presents.' When a full M-G-M title appeared at a premiere, Ingram allegedly stopped the show, removed the title and began again.

Ingram was an extraordinarily attractive man, better looking than most of his leading men, flamboyant, romantic, and with the dark and disturbing aspect that accompanies those qualities. O'Leary does not investigate that

side. It will be for critics of the future to analyse the films, and the man who made them—his fascination with the East, his embracing of Mohammedanism, his Velasquez-like interest in dwarfs, his love of the military. What O'Leary has done is to contact those who knew him and worked with him, and to present a clear-cut narrative of Ingram's career.

When O'Leary finished his book, he showed it to Alice Terry. 'I think you know Rex,' she said. 'It seems strange that you know him so well without ever having met him, but there were things

that I didn't understand about him that you didn't understand either. I never did quite understand Rex, but I think that was why I was in love with him. I think the minute you begin to understand somebody, you've had it.'

O'Leary has done film historians an immense service. The book has been carefully researched, and the filmography is excellent. There are also many remarkable stills—pictures which contain the qualities of the Ingram films ... beautiful, romantic, haunting, grotesque, magical.

KEVIN BROWNLOW

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dent for *Variety* ... ALEXANDER SESONSKE is a Professor of Philosophy and Film Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and has written on cinema for *The Georgia Review* and other journals. His book *Jean Renoir: The French Films 1924-39* was due to be published this spring by the Harvard University Press ... ANTHONY SMITH is Director of the British Film Institute. His most recent publication is *The Geopolitics of Information*.



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## LETTERS

### Independent Frame

SIR.—As the director of the first film to be made by the Independent Frame System—*Under the Frozen Falls*—I must congratulate your contributor, Julian Poole, on his grasp of the System's intricacies. I wrote a piece about it at the time (February 1948) for a trade journal called *Film Industry*. Though the System is easy enough to comprehend, I well remember how difficult it was to describe.

In his article, Julian Poole duly draws attention to the irony that a system devised to overcome an acute shortage of studio space loses its main justification when studios become readily available. But in commenting upon the apparent lack of support accorded to the System by the Rank Organisation, he says, 'This may explain why such dreadful material was foisted on to Aquila.' Adding, 'If on the other hand Aquila chose its own material, then the Rank management was at fault in putting the experiment in the hands of this group.'

It is my contention that Aquila chose the material for themselves. On the other hand, though, it can hardly be said that the Rank management was at fault in putting the experiment in the hands of this group since the experiment (with *Frozen Falls*) had already been seen to work. Where the Rank Organisation could be said to have failed was in leaving the subsequent creative choice to Aquila because, though they were brilliant and proven technicians, their creative level could, on the

evidence, scarcely be considered high. Indeed, it was the explicit policy of David Rawnsley (so in love with his brain child) to view stories and directors as of lesser importance than the System itself.

It was, however, inaccurate for Rank to say, in effect, 'We made demands on the creative talent in the industry that were beyond its resources.' It is my guess that the creative talent was never approached. Though I grant that if it had been they would have found few takers from among the already successful directors, any youthful and promising talent would have jumped at the opportunity and, in my view, would not have found the System stifling. Moreover, aside from the chance of being offered a creative outlet, what a glorious box of tricks would have been theirs to conjure with, but conjure with creatively, not just out of economic necessity.

I should, I feel, clarify my use of the word creative, for I do not, in this context, intend it to extend to anything more elevated than the attainment of the sort of rattling good entertainment the public would happily have paid to see—something that is, in fact, found fairly consistently these days in television.

I wonder, does it all come back to just another aspect of the English disease—where all too many executives see themselves as being in business to save money rather than make it?

Yours faithfully,  
DARREL CATLING

Old Hatfield, Herts.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI WARNER for 1941,  
*The Elephant Man*.  
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ITC for *Being There*.  
GTO for *Breaking Glass*.  
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photograph of Antony Balch.  
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ATV for *Bloody Kids*.  
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ALEXANDER SESONSKE for *The Enchanted Drawing, How Jones Lost His Roll, The Teddy Bears*.  
YVONNE RAINER for *Working Title: Journeys from Berlin*.  
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DAVID GILL for 'Hollywood' interview photographs.  
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JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR for photograph of Hitchcock shop.

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## BOARDWALK (ITC)

A particularly pernicious racism stalks the Coney Island boardwalk, along with the mixed juvenile gang of blacks, Puerto Ricans and Orientals who terrorise Ruth Gordon and Art Carney's sweet old couple. In his rush to pull every sentimental stop, Stephen Verona misses all the grace notes of *The Lords of Flatbush*. (Linda Manz.)

## BREAKING GLASS (GTO)

This predictable rags-to-riches saga of a brassy young London singer (Hazel O'Connor) is buttressed by most of the genre's clichés, but nevertheless displays sufficient vigour and sense of place to commend itself as a brisk, up-to-the-minute commercial enterprise. (Phil Daniels; director, Brian Gibson.)

## CATTLE ANNIE AND LITTLE BRITCHES (Hemdale)

Outlaw Burt Lancaster plays nanny to a pair of runaway girls smitten with the romance of the old West, rediscovering his professional pride in the process. Very whimsical. (Rod Steiger, Amanda Plummer, Diane Lane; director, Lamont Johnson.)

## EVICTORS, THE (ITC)

Excellent locations, measured direction and low-key performances lend a pleasing touch of naturalism to what is otherwise a conventional, *Psycho*-ish tale of a couple murderously badgered out of their new home by a sinister stranger. (Michael Parks, Jessica Harper, Vic Morrow; director, Charles B. Pierce.)

## FAME (CIC)

Alan Parker's breathlessly crosscut vignettes of the all-singin'-and-dancin' activities at New York's High School for the Performing Arts, executed with a rumbustious flair largely vitiated by the script's cornball sentiments about the human pageant on both sides of the footlights. (Irene Cara, Barry Miller, Gene Anthony Ray.)

## FINAL COUNTDOWN, THE (United Artists)

Clumping fantasy about a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier time-warped back 40 years to the eve of Pearl Harbour. Can history be changed if the Japs are blasted? The question is answered as leadenly as it is asked. (Kirk Douglas, Martin Sheen, Katharine Ross; director, Don Taylor.)

## GREAT ROCK 'N' ROLL SWINDLE, THE (Virgin)

Auto-destruct act by the ex-Sex Pistols and their manager Malcolm McLaren, who explains his great con game in creating punk rock. Tartly conceived and executed as a load of sub-Brechtian rubbish. (Director, Julian Temple.)

## HUSSY (Watchgrove)

Tart with far from golden heart finds a soft spot in it for American crook in

this local day trip to demi-monde and underworld. A woefully spavined runner from the Don Boyd stable. (Helen Mirren, John Shea; director, Matthew Chapman.)

## KING OF THE GYPSIES (CIC)

Gypsodym is a combination of colourful folklore and mythic power struggle in this addled slice of ethnic life. *The Godfather* clearly shows through the plot, and other distractions in the casting: Susan Sarandon and Brooke Shields repeating *Pretty Baby*'s mother and daughter; Sterling Hayden's ever-repeating patriarch. (Shelley Winters; director, Frank Pierson.)

## LAST MARRIED COUPLE IN AMERICA, THE (CIC)

George Segal and Natalie Wood as embattled monogamists, watching their friends fall in a matrimonial version of 'ten little Indians'. Despite the comedy, this is very much Hollywood's sin-and-retribution formula of yesteryear, with the new morality proving to be out of the frying pan, into the inferno. (Dom DeLuise, Valerie Harper; director, Gilbert Cates.)

## LITTLE MISS MARKER (CIC)

The third official version of Runyon's slim tale about Broadway types going moist-eyed over a moppet benefits greatly from Walter Matthau's seedy eloquence and writer/director Walter Bernstein's crisp efficiency. Sentimentality, and Julie Andrews, eventually assert themselves. (Tony Curtis, Lee Grant.)

## NJINSKY (CIC)

Hit-and-miss biopic of the dancer and his mentor-lover Diaghilev. Its lavish period reconstruction and refreshingly clear-eyed approach to the central relationship compensates for numerous *faux pas* in its treatment of ballet. Affectingly lifelike performances from Alan Bates and dancer George de la Peña. (Leslie Brown, Alan Badel; director, Herbert Ross.)

## OUTSIDERS, THE (Contemporary)

This bleak, angry look at poverty in a feudal South Indian village never manages to concentrate its effects: the acting shoots off into heightened melodrama, and the anarchic protagonist (Vasudeva Rao) remains a peculiarly 'mystic' anti-hero for the Marxist Mrinal Sen. (Narayana Rao, Mamata Shankar.)

## POTO AND CABENGO (The Other Cinema)

Jean-Pierre Gorin, Godard's erstwhile collaborator, raises a host of intriguing questions about blocked human communication in this tangential 'documentary' examination of the pressures on Gracie and Ginnie Kennedy, the twin Californian girls who provoked media excitement with their apparently 'private' language.

## RUDE BOY (Tigon)

Jack Hazan and David Mingay follow a slouching young no-hoper from London's East End as he tries (and fails) to find his identity as a consort of The Clash musicians: a self-conscious blend of fact and fiction which attempts to pinpoint the discontents of a generation. (Ray Gange.)

## SWEET WILLIAM (ITC)

Insensitive adaptation of Beryl Bainbridge's delicately observed novel about a suburban philanderer and his provincial English girlfriend. Ms. Bainbridge's script almost survives the fractured direction of Claude Whatham and a gauche central performance by Sam Waterston. (Jenny Agutter, Daphne Oxenford.)

## WILDCATS OF ST. TRINIAN'S, THE (Enterprise)

Droopingly dated gags about a 'wildcat' strike and the perennial frustrations of adolescence at Ronald Searle's venerable academy: Frank Launder, in his fifth stab at recreating the St. Trinian's spirit, is almost as hopelessly marooned in time as Sheila Hancock, the school's dithering headmistress. (Joe Melia, Thorley Walters, Michael Hordern.)

## ● AMERICAN GIGOLO (CIC)

Paul Schrader's latest essay in the transcendental exploitation movie. The dynamic remains much the same—visceral film-making with a metaphysical punch—and the plot ploughs the hero (Richard Gere) along a familiar course from macho pride through existential terror to Bressonian grace. The ending, in fact, is Schrader's most gratuitously spiritual get-out to date: the rack on which Gere has been stretched, his inability to accept love rather than to give it, is suddenly released as a dissatisfied senator's wife (Lauren Hutton) comes to his aid on a trumped-up murder charge. But what lifts *American Gigolo* out of the rut of Schrader's determinedly hybrid movie-making (*Blue Collar*, *Hardcore*) is his increasing assurance as a director. Bresson apart, European influences give a strangely alien gloss to the Los Angeles locations, and turn the film into a rather curious cultural artefact, neither wholly American nor European. (Hector Elizondo, Nina van Pallandt.)

## ● BLACK STALLION, THE (United Artists)

Drawn from Walter Farley's bestselling children's novel, this is a happily unsentimental moral tale on the themes of trust and fortitude, about a grave American schoolboy (Kelly Reno) shipwrecked on a Mediterranean island with an Arab stallion whom he imagines as Bucephalus, Alexander the Great's legendary horse. Carroll Ballard's first feature is directed with rare seriousness and often photographed with what seems delirious excitement by Caleb Deschanel. Most successful of all, perhaps, is the way the film's diverse parts—the opening on board a mahoganised passenger liner; the long sequence on the rocky island; the return of the boy and horse to suburban Flushing, New York; and the climactic horse race in California—blend into a world view which is neither quite tangible nor quite imaginary, but is wholly its own. (Teri Garr, Mickey Rooney, Clarence Muse, Hoyt Axton.)

## ● EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, THE (Fox)

Amid all the euphoria surrounding *Star Wars*, a few critical voices were raised, admitting the fun but protesting the emptiness of the exercise. Their spoil-sportism is amply vindicated by this sequel, now revealed to be Episode Five in a projected nine-part saga (of which episodes one to three, six to nine remain to be filmed). Even the fun has worn desperately thin, what with the characters simply repeating their proven mannerisms, none of the sets even approaching the inventiveness of (say) the earlier Mos Eisley saloon, and many of the highlights emerging as blatant echoes (the laser sword duel; Luke Skywalker studying for his spiritual A-levels). Indulgence is strained even further by the fact that Irvin Kershner, taking over from Lucas as director, has introduced a more ponderous tempo, evidently in an attempt to treat the characters as though they shared in-depth relationships instead of merely comic-strip juxtapositions. (Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Billy Dee Williams.)

## ● TIN DRUM, THE (United Artists)

The remarkable thing about this adaptation of Günter Grass' first novel is that it works at all, given the problem of embodying a hero who, foiled in his desire to return to the womb after his first glimpse of the world into which he has been born, wills himself to stop growing at the age of three but continues to age in years, wisdom, malice, lust and despair. Volker Schlöndorff, with Grass credited as script collaborator, has produced a pedantically exact transcription. Sometimes beautiful, often strikingly bizarre, these images are lent coherence by the extraordinary presence of David Bennent, a diminutive twelve-year-old utterly persuasive as an adult baby and endowed with eyes of chilling candour. The trouble is that Schlöndorff, robbing the book of several dimensions in the process of pruning it, uses this gaze almost exclusively as a silent scream of protest against the iniquities of the Third Reich. (Mario Adorf, Angela Winkler.)

## ● TOM HORN (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Despite its ragged output, the Western went through some striking permutations in the 70s, with history and myth locked in subtly mutual reflection. This version of the last years of Tom Horn, legendary government scout, bounty hunter and general trouble-shooter, in fact tries a little too hard for the mood and approach of the *nouveau* Western, tending to freeze its subject and empty its landscape in the cause of putting them both in their place. Dramatically and thematically, it is littered with too many wide open spaces (the central love affair seems to have been subject to some desperate re-editing). Atmospherically, however, it is much more assured, with John Alonzo's Panavision photography registering both the faraway call of the mountains and the sullen, day-to-day life of a muddy cowtown. Steve McQueen stumps through the part of the hero out of his time with weebegone, battened-down resignation. (Linda Evans, Richard Farnsworth, Billy Green Bush; director, William Wiard.)



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"DIMENTICARE VENEZIA"

starring

**ERLAND JOSEPHSON  
MARIANGELA MELATO**

"DAVIDE DI DONATELLO" AWARD FOR THE BEST FILM OF THE YEAR  
AMERICAN ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATION